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This Book Collecting Racket



# This Book Collecting Racket

BY HARRY W. SCHWARTZ



*with a Foreword*

BY PAUL JORDAN-SMITH



*NORMANDIE HOUSE*  
CHICAGO · 1937

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*To D. B. Smith*



## Preface to Revised Edition

*WHEN I began to write This Book-Collecting Racket my purpose was to expose some of the more flagrant abuses in book collecting. As the book proceeded, however, and as I warmed up in the process, my original intention got out of hand, and I soon found myself writing not only about abuses, but about almost everything pertaining to book collecting.*

*Did not my business prevent me from keeping at the job, I would be able to issue a fair-sized book. But I could only devote my spare time to writing and frequently had to drop my manuscript to take up the business of earning a living. This is the reason I have issued the book in parts or installments. With the completion of the first part it was suggested to me that it would make a good magazine article. After it was submitted to several magazines I learned that although the editors, as individuals, liked it, the article could not be published. At first I was surprised, but when I discussed it with several editors I learned how naive I had been. (In justice I wish to say that the New Masses magazine had accepted several articles but being pressed for space at the time, the editors returned them.) I was not surprised later to find publishers as hostile to my MS as the magazines had been.*

*I found, as others had found before me, that it is not easy to attack property in America. It may occur strange to some of my readers to use the word "property" in regard to authors. But, alas, that is what they are known as to publishers. A publishers'*

*list is his stock in trade or his property. He has money invested in them, and they pay dividends just like good bonds and stocks do. Therefore, to attack an author, as I have attacked several in this book, is to attack a publisher's property. And, of course, the publishers would have nothing to do with it.*

*In conclusion it might be advisable to state that I have made extensive use of Book Prices Current and booksellers' catalogs, using them as a barometer of collectors' opinion and prejudice. The result of this research is frequently brutal in its nakedness, but it is the only gauge of collectors' opinion that is trustworthy. A collector's opinion of any author is in direct ratio to what he is willing to pay for his work, and a bookseller catalogs his books with the collector's pocketbook in mind.*

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## Foreword

*Nor the most ardent collector will deny that much folly is wrapped up with the technique of his craft; and some have been slowly awakened, thanks to the kind offices of such books as this, to an awareness of studied knavery on the part of those who would profit by an otherwise harmless hobby. For the follies of our cult, one may, indeed must, preserve an indulgent smile; they afford proof that human nature can survive the dust and solitary seductions of bibliolatry; that even the sapient and cultured share the foibles of the vast brotherhood of Jackasserei. Indeed, the follies of collecting stimulate the fun of it, if they be not taken too seriously; some of them are inescapable.*

*For example, if I want to own a perfect collection of Samuel Butler firsts, I must have, among the forty-odd necessary items, an Alps and Sanctuaries of 1882 in its first binding. Now if I were wholly reasonable, which, for all my inner protestations, I am not, I should be content with a second or third binding of that amusing book. As a matter of fact, all copies issued up to and including 1908 are of the same printing. Moreover, all of them bear the same ornaments on the front covers. But the monograms of the publishers (on the spine), the title page, and the first two leaves reveal points of difference, trifling to the scholar but important for the simon-pure collector. The man who puts scholarship first will get in any of these issues the actual first printing, with the original errors; for him the first Longmans or Fifield*

*issues are as good as the first Bogue. The second Bogue (issued in the same year as the first), save for two words on the title, is indistinguishable from the first. But the collector must have beveled edges, the correct monogram, and endpapers to perfect his collection, and that is the end of the matter. Folly it is; nevertheless it is an organic, justifiable folly.*

*But all this bother about removable dust jackets may be called, on the other hand, inorganic and irrelevant nonsense. And as for the limited editions to which Mr. Schwartz calls attention, in most cases they may be taken as sufficient evidence of the existence of a "racket."*

*One must not, however, blame the bookseller too harshly for this sorry state of things. One calls to mind that honest dealers here and abroad have long protested against what began as conspicuous waste amongst those who lack conspicuous taste, and was finally well wound up by the excessive greed of certain publishers. Concerning these absurdities, however, Mr. Schwartz has spoken with sufficient clarity and emphasis.*

*And, for one, I heartily approve of this sane, honest counterblast. To me and those bibliophiles for whom I entertain respect, book collecting has its origin in either or both of two motives: the love of books; their use as tools of research. These two are frequently one, or become one. For collecting as a mere fad of the idle and addlepated who require to be told what they should collect, I have no use whatever; neither do I weep when I read that those who bought books for mere speculation have lost their money. The lads dear to my heart are those stout fellows able to rejoice in gathering together the commonly unesteemed for reasons and loves of their own. Praise heaven, one of my favorite modern authors has lost favor in recent years, so that now at last*

*I am able to possess the original manuscript of his finest novel, purchased for a song. For his sake I am sorry that the market has tumbled; but my own love of the book and my faith that it must ultimately find its place among "high spots" are unaffected by turns of fashion and manipulations of the market. As I have said elsewhere: "We love books for their wisdom, their beauty, the pleasures they afford and the comfort they give; they open doors to the only freedom we may know. Let us collect them for these reasons and no other."*

PAUL JORDAN-SMITH



## Introduction

*For the past ten years I have been reading books on book collecting. During this period I have covered most of the ground from Richard de Bury to A. Edward Newton. True, I have passed over a good many of the so-called classics in this field, but only because they were either too dull to read or too scarce for my purse. Yet, during all this time, I felt that an honest and fearless book should be written of present-day problems which confront the collector. Most of the writers about book collecting are too sentimental to accomplish this, and go mooning about the past, or else they are too timid to strike out with a good body blow. They either discuss their collections with tears in their eyes and sighs wafted about, or they mumble an imprecation under their breath, hoping that the reader will not hear it. They have all lacked guts.*

*The truth of the matter is that a book of this kind has long been wanting. We have had plenty of the other kind. I have made an attempt to set down some of the greatest abuses in the book-collecting field. I have avoided nothing that I believed deserved to be exposed. What should be done to correct these abuses is not my purpose to consider here. I make no apology for this work, and if it opens the eyes of a few collectors and dealers, it will have accomplished its intention.*

*When my partner and I went into business in Milwaukee, our friends advised us strongly against it. They told us that Milwaukee was a poor book city; that the city had a huge Polish popula-*

*tion that never read a book year in and year out, let alone buying books. And as far as first editions were concerned the mere thought gave them bellylaughs. But we girded our loins and without a penny (I mean this literally) we launched into business.*

*The first year our stock of first editions consisted of one shelf with about fifty books on it. These were taken from our own personal library. People coming into the tiny shop would look curiously at the case labeled first editions and ask what the words meant. We tried to explain as patiently as we could. Those that indicated even the slightest interest we took more pains with and explained just what first editions were and why. Some of these expressed surprise that most of the books were marked more than new copies could be purchased for. Again, we explained why this was true. We lent, to those who showed a little sympathy for our enthusiasm, books on book collecting, while others we inspired with long, intimate talks on our hobby and business. The first customer we made was a little hesitant about spending an extra quarter for a first English edition of her favorite author, Tomlinson. When, a year later, we offered to buy back this same book at a profit of a dollar and a half to her, she refused to sell. When another year passed and we offered to buy other books we had sold her, at a profit to her of about eight dollars, she began to understand. Today she is one of our best customers and has a splendid and ever-growing collection of modern first editions.*

*In five years we have turned the tables. When we came to Milwaukee, there was not a single collector of modern first editions in the city. The other bookstores contented themselves with selling schoolbooks and best sellers. They saw no reason for trying to create a market for first editions. The people want best sellers, they said; why should we break our necks trying to sell them*

*first editions? They want Fannie Hurst, Kathleen Norris, Warwick Deeping, and so on. It would be suicide to stock Tomlinson, O'Flaherty, Faulkner, Hemingway, Aldington, Hanley, Bates, Davies, Huxley and Coppard. Impertinence or suicide, or, perhaps both. But we accomplished the seemingly impossible, and today carry as large a stock of first editions as many metropolitan stores. Our local collectors can be counted in scores, and it is no trick for us today to sell fifty copies of a collected author in the first edition.*

*You might ask me why I have written all this? Because I wanted to make clear that in spite of all I have written to the contrary, I am a firm believer in first editions. I am, however, vigorously against the method used today in selling them, and I wished to point out that a shop can succeed in this business without subscribing to the abuses set down in this book. True, there were some people who suspected that book collecting was some sort of a mild racket. Others believed that to ask more than the published price of a book was downright robbery. Still others had the notion that there was something obscene about it. This last group puzzled me for some time, until one day I found what I believed was the reason, if the word "reason" is not too intelligent a word to describe a hideous stupidity. I showed a person a number of first editions, and he remarked that a few of them were privately printed. Before I had a chance to explain the reason for this, he leered at me and said, "Aha, dirty books, eh? Dirty books! I see." This class I have left entirely alone, as I know their congenital stupidity bars them from ever becoming book collectors.*

HARRY W. SCHWARTZ



## This Book Collecting Racket

IT HAS BEEN FREQUENTLY SAID THAT THE COLLECTORS OF BOOKS ARE at least intelligent; let us see. There is probably not another group of people that are as slavishly snobbish and as stupidly unimaginative as this group. Let a novel for one of a hundred reasons become popular (here I do not mean popular in the cinematic sense), and it will be sought for in the first edition by many collectors. Some of these will exert every effort to obtain a copy in mint condition, caring little what they pay for a copy. This was true in the case of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder. The collectors went positively mad and haunted their booksellers in an effort to get copies of the first edition. The trade journals were crammed with advertisements for the book, and not only the large and well known shops, but a host of tiny unheard-of "shoppes" and even lending libraries were clamoring for copies in the first edition. What did it matter that the author had written a far better book two years previous; what did it matter that that book had been a complete flop; what did it matter that in a short time the book would again be on the shelves of rare book dealers in abundance? It mattered very little. The fact was that collectors wanted the book at that particular time much as a man wants a straw hat in June. Several months later he would not want a copy; neither does a man want a straw hat in September. If there is intelligence in this, I am a crocodile.

To give a clearer picture of what happened in this instance I reprint the following paragraph from the *Publishers' Weekly*:

"Once more history has been made. For the second time a copy of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* has made its appearance at auc-

tion. The occasion was the Alfred A. Knopf sale at the Anderson Galleries in New York on October 23, and the price was \$18. This is a decline of \$8 from the last and only previously recorded sale at auction at the Anderson Galleries on April 25th, when *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* was less than six months old. The new price does not necessarily indicate a bear market. And whatever it indicates, if anything, the fact remains that not often does a book (particularly a book published in a tolerably large edition) attain the distinction of selling at a heavy premium over published price in less than a year from the date of publication.

"Meanwhile during recent months, *The Bridge* has achieved catalog listing by at least three or four booksellers, at prices ranging from \$17 up. The fact is significant, for it means in no case did the bookseller presumably have a customer waiting. The demand for first editions of *The Bridge* has fallen conspicuously."

Let us take another case. Faulkner's books have been published since 1926 (the *Marble Faun* was published in 1924, but we are dealing with novels now), and how many people heard of him? I venture to say very, very few. In point of fact, his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, was remaindered. Along came his *Mosquitoes*, and what happened? Precisely nothing, and I am still amazed why Liveright hung onto it and did not remainder it also. *Sartoris* was his third novel, and it also was a flop; so was *The Sound and the Fury*; so was *As I Lay Dying*. And then the intelligent collectors bestirred themselves and shouted for Faulkner? I should say not.

Along came *Sanctuary*, and the smut-hounds, with their keen noses—they were the ones to find the book. The timid, fatuous collectors waited for them to sound the cry, then opened their eyes, shook themselves, and the melee started. And what a battle it was! The trade journals worked day and night to get out the advertisements for first editions of Faulkner. It made the previous scramble for Wilder trivial. Literally, every book store in America and many in England started the alarms going. Scouts

jumped onto their motorcycles and began to comb the country; spys infested the lending libraries searching for copies of the first edition. And while *Sanctuary* was the immediate reason for all this, the early books of Mr. Faulkner soared, and mint copies of *Soldiers' Pay* and *Mosquitoes* were at tremendous premiums. Immediately *The Marble Faun* became a very scarce book, and copies passed hands for fifty dollars and more. Lest the reader think I am exaggerating, I again reprint the following from the pages of the *Publishers' Weekly*:

"William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* was published February sixth. It wasn't until the March twenty-first issue of the *Weekly* that advertisements began to appear for *Sanctuary* firsts, but for ten solid weeks after that, the Book Exchange section contained more ads for Faulkner first editions than for those of any other author. Out of twenty-one *Publishers' Weekly*'s after those first *Sanctuary* ads broke, only three issues did not have a preponderance of William Faulkner advertisements. Once Faulkner was tied by William McFee, twice Willa Cather led by one ad. These facts might be interpreted as evidence that *Sanctuary* is one of the most sought after books of the year. William Faulkner's first book, *The Marble Faun* is now valued at more than twice as much as original editions of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*."

I could go on and cite cases for the rest of this book if that were necessary. Perhaps it would be well to mention just a few more names. What I have just said regarding Wilder and Faulkner, pertains to Hemingway, Morley, and Lawrence, as indeed it does to almost every first-rate writer. Let us look at the case of Lawrence for a moment. Lawrence published *The White Peacock* in 1911; this was followed by *The Rainbow* in 1915; then came a series of masterpieces: *Sons and Lovers*, *Women In Love*, and in 1928, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Did the collectors make any attempt to gauge the importance of Lawrence? They did not. The bulk of the sales of Lawrence was confined to the *intelligentsia* with a scattering of readers among the neurotic

middle classes. The collector left him, for the most part, entirely alone. It is true that one or two of the discriminating booksellers catalogued Lawrence from the start, but ask them how many of his books were sold. Again, as with *Sanctuary* the rush started with *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and collectors discovered Lawrence. Is it a reflection on the collector, or perhaps the bookseller, that in the case of both Faulkner and Lawrence they crashed through with sensational books? This is a question worth reflecting upon. When Lawrence died, the clamor for his first editions began in earnest. *The White Peacock* was run up to one hundred dollars in no time, and the other items came close to this figure.

It might be of interest to collectors to know how Lawrence published his *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The book, first called *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, was submitted to Secker, Lawrence's publishers, who refused to consider even an expurgated edition. It is amusing to read Lawrence's letter to Secker; it is almost pleading:

“... Then the expurgations . . . I did a fair amount of blanking out and changing, then I sort of got colour-blind, and didn't know any more what was supposed to be proper and what not. So you must consider it. Don't all in a rush be scared and want to pull whole sections out. Just consider a bit patiently, in detail, what is possible and what isn't. And then if there are little bits you can leave out without making obvious gaps, then I'm willing you should leave them out. But if you want any substantial alterations made, then consider the thing carefully in detail, and mark it carefully in blue pencil, and send me the pages you want changed, and I'll do my best. I think we ought to manage . . .”

When Secker refused the novel, Lawrence went ahead with arrangements to publish it himself in Florence. It was printed in a little shop where nobody understood English (a good thing in this case) and some of the men couldn't even read. Lawrence published a thousand copies, of which five hundred were meant for America, at two pounds per copy. He sent order slips to all

his friends asking them to subscribe to copies and call it to the attention of their friends. To each of his friends he described the book, calling it a phallic novel. He draws a distinction between a sexual novel and a phallic novel. Sex is a mental reaction, a cerebral affair. The phallic is spontaneous, warm and tender.

The novel was quickly suppressed in both America and England, but it appears that most of the first copies sent out were received at the other end without mishap. The novel was stopped almost at once in America, but in England there was some delay before seizures were made. About eight hundred copies of the book were sent to England. There were at least four pirated editions in America; the first appeared on the market within a month of the arrival in America of the first genuine copies from Florence. It was a facsimile of the original, produced by the photographic method, and was sold, even by reliable booksellers, to the unsuspecting public as if it were the original first edition. A French pirate issued the book also, printed from type, and offered Lawrence the usual royalties if he would authorize it. Lawrence, of course, refused. Lawrence brought the remaining copies of the Florence edition to England. From England he planned to fill orders for the book as they came in, but the police gave him a scare and he hurriedly tried to hide them somewhere. Richard Aldington offered to take the copies and conceal them in his home. The booksellers to whom Lawrence had sent copies returned them, saying they could not handle the book. Fie on them! the poor, innocent souls.

The Knopfs liked the novel but did not publish it until four years later, when they brought out an expurgated edition. Secker also brought out an expurgated edition four years after they refused to meddle with the book. So the brave do battle and the cowards reap the rewards. It seems that the Vanguard Press in America were considering a complete edition but never published it.

One of the first American pirates was Samuel Roth. His pub-

lishing firm, called William Faro, Inc., brought out an expurgated edition that sold by the thousands. When I called Roth a pirate in one of my rare book catalogs, he resented the accusation and wrote a letter to me from which I quote the following excerpts:

"It is not true that I took advantage of D. H. Lawrence while he lived, or of his widow after he died. On the contrary, we kept, until recently, on account for Mrs. Lawrence, a royalty statement covering every copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* sold by us. When Mrs. Lawrence came to this country, I immediately got in touch with her at the office of her agent, Curtis Brown. I told her that I was anxious to settle the account for her, and she replied that I was the first American publisher to approach her with an offer of money, and that she seemed unable to get any money from the other publishers of her husband's books.

"At the last minute, Knopf changed his mind and decided that the stage and screen rights of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were something to gamble on, and offered to advance her more money than I offered if she would refuse to do business with me. I have never blamed Mrs. Lawrence for preferring an arrangement with Knopf to an arrangement with me. But I do not think it honest to accuse me of any unfairness to Lawrence, or to his wife . . ."

What occurred to both Lawrence and Faulkner has just happened again. Erskine Caldwell published *The Bastard*, his first book, in 1929. The title was not in its favor and although the book sold readily, it sold largely as erotica. Mrs. Caldwell, who operated a bookstore at this period, was arrested for selling a copy, and Mr. Caldwell and his frightened printer stayed up all night and printed a broadside called *In Defense of Myself*. This broadside is a masterly defense of the author and is extremely rare. When I was engaged in preparing a check list of Mr. Caldwell's work and asked him for any material I may have omitted, he, with his customary generosity, sent me a copy. Because *In*

*Defense of Myself* puts the incident so adroitly, I quote from the first paragraph.

"The charge brought against Helen Caldwell, my wife, by County Attorney Ingalls, of Cumberland County, for selling a copy of *The Bastard* in her bookshop, and, curiously, against me for being the author of the novel, has resulted in official suppression of the book without trial before a judge, or before a jury. Not having the opportunity to defend myself or my novel, means that with the consent of County Attorney Ingalls himself *The Bastard* contains an impure word, or words. No attempt was made to isolate these words in my hearing by the county attorney, and neither was the offer made to permit my defense of them as being thought necessary in the construction of the story. With this comedy of justice bowing from the stage, the novel was blanketed with this brand of obscenity and hustled out of town. In the city of Portland and in the county of Cumberland, one superimposed upon the other in the state of Maine, *The Bastard* is obscene, lewd and immoral; likewise the author, by command of County Attorney Ingalls, is obscene, lewd and immoral in the city of Portland and in the county of Cumberland, all imposed upon the state of Maine. Therefore, it is a crime in the country to sell the novel, give it to my friends and, tomorrow perhaps, read it."

Needless to say, those who were looking for erotica in *The Bastard* did not find it. It was an honest and good work.

*Poor Fool* came in 1930. Not as good as *The Bastard*, it nevertheless showed talent. Then came *American Earth*, a fine collection of short stories. Scribners published fifteen hundred copies in 1931, and the book is still in print in the first edition. *Tobacco Road* was published in 1932. Again Scribners published fifteen hundred copies, and up to a short time ago the book was also in print in the first edition. (The first editions of both these books are no longer available and the latter is very scarce.) Both these books were excellent, each making a definite contribution to

American literature. The reviews were splendid, too, yet the books did not sell. Then what happened? Why did Caldwell suddenly become a collected author, almost rivalling Faulkner? The reason, I think, lies in *God's Little Acre* and Sumner. *God's Little Acre* was published in 1933, in an edition of twenty-five hundred copies. It was attacked by Sumner and defended by Viking, the publishers. Fortunately, an intelligent judge handled the case, and the book was acquitted. To those interested, the fifth edition of the book contains the court's decision reprinted in full as an appendix. Again, a sensational book was responsible for the author's success. For months after the publication of *God's Little Acre* the trade papers were full of advertisements for the book, and Caldwell was at last on his way to becoming a collected author. Scribners sold more than two thirds of their editions of his earlier books only after Sumner got busy. To sum up: Neither reviews nor merit could help Caldwell. It took a sensational book to bring him to the attention of collectors.

Unquestionably, there was merit there in the first place. I am not arguing that any sensational book will achieve a collected book status, otherwise Tiffany Thayer and Jack Woodford would be America's most collected authors. But it cannot be concealed that the spark that set the charge off was again the sensational.

It would appear from the above that the collector, instead of being the intelligent, discriminating connoisseur that he is believed to be, is the most accomplished of fashion-mongers, following like sheep in the path of popular approval.

Lest this appear too severe an indictment, let us investigate some of the developments of book collecting during the last several years.

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The germ of fashionable collecting spread among the entire collecting fraternity and eventually brought into vogue what became known as "high-spots." These high-spots were books that

every collector wanted at one and the same time. Perhaps it began with Newton, who in 1928 compiled a list of novels he believed were great and outstanding. This was followed by Merle Johnson's book of high-spots, and a swarm of mediocrities, culminating, I believe, in the most stupid list ever compiled, that of Mr. Barton Currie, in his *Fishers of Books*. Mr. Currie compiled a list of books with reasons for his selections that a moron would be ashamed to admit as his own. After stating that Cabell had degenerated into a sixth-rate writer; that Mencken, Nathan and Sinclair Lewis were cheap wise-crackers, he points to Booth Tarkington as the supreme example of creative achievement in America. I do not think that this bit of profound critical acumen need detain us. The immediate result, however, of all this compilation of "Great Novels" was to urge on collectors for the books they did not possess. Collectors everywhere wanted *Ethan Frome*, *My Antonia*, *Messer Marco Polo*, *Silas Lapham*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Man of Property*, *Moby Dick*, *Monsieur Beaucaire*, *Parnassus on Wheels*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Two Years Before the Mast*, *The Virginian*, and so on, and so on. As a consequence of the great demand, these books became scarce and doubled and trebled and quadrupled in price.

Yet even this did not make the collector hesitate. Willingly he would exchange sixty and seventy-five dollars for a copy of *Messer Marco Polo*, although he could obtain a fine copy of *Tales of Mean Streets* for ten. Dealers were kept busy advertising for the same books week after week to supply some clamoring collector, while row upon row of good books were gathering dust on his shelves. Prices finally soared so high that even dealers began to caution their customers. But all to no purpose. Galsworthy, Shaw, Barrie, Kipling, and Stevenson, not to mention scores of lesser lights, were inflated to absurd heights.

The speculator, of course, helped this along. He came to rare books late in the season, but he played the game for all it was

worth. Not satisfied with one copy of a limited edition, he bought three, five, and sometimes ten copies. He held these until the market rose and then dumped them. Book collecting to him was a means of making money. He neither cared for the books he bought nor did he read them. Some of the more unscrupulous dealers helped this along by suggesting books that would rise in price and thus, with profit as a motive, induced speculation. Mr. William Roberts in his "Notes on Book Sales" in the *Literary Supplement* of the London *Times*, makes the following comment on the speculating collector: "The truth is that the enormous sums paid for books three years ago were paid on behalf of American collectors—and very often collectors who, following the fashion, had little knowledge of what they were buying, who quickly lost faith in books as securities, and who, with the slump, transferred their interest elsewhere. The American dealer was left with a stock purchased at fantastic prices."

Mr. Hopkins also made the following comment: "Speculators among dealers and collectors, to a considerable extent, undertook to bring stock exchange methods into the auction room. They wanted to buy the books that were the most active in the market, the surest of a quick turnover, the most likely to bring a good profit, and some of their early manipulations were sufficiently successful to encourage these speculative methods."

Another feature of this speculating frenzy and high-spot craze was the opening of a large number of shops by society matrons and college aesthetes. These people did not know a first edition from a tenth edition and were about as familiar with the rare book business as a trained ape. Having read several books in their lives, they set themselves up as literary critics; as first editions were the fashion, they bombarded their friends to buy. That this sort of shop is rapidly disappearing need not surprise us. Having been given birth by the boom, they died with the slump. Not having a single qualification for bookselling (and it was fortuitous that they engaged in bookselling; it might

have been, with equal success, interior decorating, operating a tea shop, or selling gifts to a bridge-mad society), they were the first ones to fold up their "Unique Booke Shoppe."

Let not my readers think that the publishers stood by quietly and watched all this. To the contrary, they smelled a good thing and were quick to grasp some profit for themselves. Limited editions were manufactured in ever increasing numbers. Production costs were entirely ignored, and books were priced at whatever figure the publisher believed the traffic would bear. An edition of two or three hundred copies was considered silly. "Limited" editions were put on the market of "only three thousand copies," and more.

Prices reached the pinnacle of absurdity in the publications of Crosby Gaige. This promoter of the Rare Book Racket proceeded to issue forty and fifty page books for fifteen, twenty, and twenty-two-fifty. Others, observing his success, stepped in, and limited editions began pouring into the market—rivers, oceans of them. All sense of proportion was thrown to the winds. Prices flew skyward and reached twenty-five, thirty-five, fifty, one hundred, several hundred dollars. Private presses sprang up like mushrooms; every classic and near classic was exhumed and outfitted with all the trappings of a limited edition; the world was combed for illustrators to produce drawings for these books, most of which were execrable. The classics being exhausted, presses began to duplicate the productions of other presses. And the collectors bought heavily and induced their friends to buy. Now these same books are dumped on the market at two and three dollars a copy. Every day sees a limited edition remaindered—another tombstone in a collector's graveyard. It will be years before these are absorbed, and some are so uninviting that it is doubtful if they will ever be absorbed, even at one-fifth of their published prices.

The publishers, not being content with the profits from the limited edition racket, are now muscling into the first trade

edition business. To say that the method of issuing the first edition of *Ann Vickers* was good business is sheer stupidity. The publishers actually achieved nothing. On the contrary, they made numerous enemies for themselves among collectors and dealers in first editions. The fact that they offered a copy of the first edition as a premium with every order for twenty-five copies of subsequent editions was no inducement to dealers not selling first editions to buy the book. Why should they buy the book in larger quantities than they normally do? To get a first edition? What would they do with the first edition, provided they know what a first edition is? They have no collectors, for collectors are not in the habit of going to department stores for their first editions. On the other hand, those dealers who sell first editions were compelled to buy twenty-five copies of a later edition which they cannot sell, for every copy they received of a first edition. Many dealers (like myself) who sell only first editions did not handle the book at all, for unable to get any copies in the first edition they were left helpless. As a consequence of this, collectors were compelled to pay a premium for a copy of the first edition and dealers in first editions had to go to department stores (who because of their buying power had received most of the firsts) for their copies. And all this because Doubleday & Doran, not satisfied with the normal profits from publishing books, muscle into the first edition business where they have no business.

« 3 »

Still another aspect of this craze was the book thief, who was ushered in by the huge demand for high-spots. Book-crook rings in New York and elsewhere sent out thieves to despoil public and private libraries. These human bookworms were given a list of books in demand and were told to get copies of the first edition; a brief description was written out for them so they would have little difficulty in identifying them. These thieves scoured the

little public libraries on the Atlantic coast and invaded the large private libraries of the universities.

The rare books were brought to the "fence," where they were in turn sent to an expert binder. The binder removed all the tell-tale labels and through a clever process smoothed out the perforations. Where a book consisted of several issues, copies were frequently "faked." This was accomplished by taking out or inserting advertisements; taking a poor copy of a first issue apart and substituting its pages with the "points" for the wrong pages in a fine copy of the second issue; totally recasing a book where the points are part of the binding, and a score of other tricks. These books were then turned over to accomplices in the book trade who eased them off on reliable (?) dealers and sometimes upon the unsuspecting collectors.

Let me say here that the collector was frequently deserving of being duped. For instead of patronizing honest dealers who guaranteed their books, he was led to purchase at a lower price, books from fly-by-night concerns, or unreliable individuals. To make a saving of several dollars he made an investment that was worthless, and tragically, he really encouraged the thieves in their operations. For it is reasonable to assume that if the thief could not successfully sell his ill-gotten rarities, he would not traffic in them. To give the reader some idea of the extent of these robberies, I reprint from the pages of the *Publishers' Weekly*:

"Charles Romm, forty-nine year old New York book dealer, was sentenced to the penitentiary, for a term not to exceed three years, on January fourth in the court of General sessions by Judge Max S. Levine. Romm, charged with being at the head of a group of library thieves who stole, over a period of three or four years, rare books valued at forty thousand dollars, was indicted on eight counts and pleaded guilty to one indictment.

"The most expensive of these books was *Fragment of a Journal of a Sentimental Philosopher*, valued at four hundred dollars, stolen from the Widener Library at Harvard, March 1, 1929.

Others were taken by Romm and his associates from Columbia, Dartmouth and New York libraries and other institutions."

Though I could mention even a greater thief, namely, Dr. Clarke, alias Gordon Forrest and Rodney Livingston, I pick out Romm purposely for two reasons. Firstly, because I almost had some dealings with this gentleman myself, and secondly, to show how easy it is for even an experienced bookseller to be fooled by these fellows. I knew Romm when he was perhaps a poorer but an honest man, in the days when he had a little bookshop in a cellar somewhere along Fourth Avenue in New York city. Some years later, being on a buying trip in New York, I was surprised upon walking into another shop than the above, to find Romm greeting me. I had almost forgotten him. I told him what my business was in New York, and he asked me to follow him into a back room. Lo and behold! I found myself in a veritable treasure house of rarities. I looked for Romm to ask him where he got the money to bring together this fine lot. He had left me alone, so I began to go through the books carefully. Frequently I found three and four copies of the books in the first editions then being sought by most dealers. There were the early Cabell, Byrne, Hearn, Dreiser, Morley, Robinson, etc. I picked out a group of thirty or forty and told Romm to keep them for me until the following day, as I did not have enough money with me then. As I left his shop the thought struck me: Why do not other dealers know of this cache? Moreover, I thought that his prices were extremely reasonable and wondered why other dealers had not snapped them up.

The following day I had lunch with another bookselling friend of mine and casually mentioned Romm and the fact that I had picked out some good buys at his shop. My friend excitedly reached across the table and grabbing my arm, demanded I tell him if I had bought anything there. I answered, in astonishment, that I had not. I was then called several names not entirely pleasing and told to stay away from Fourth Avenue. My friend con-

tinued: "Every book you saw in Romm's shop was stolen. If you were not a trusting fool you would know that they were stolen. Do you think that all booksellers in New York are stupid? He has several thousand dollars worth of books in that room, and every one of them came from a library." I asked, if this were true, why did not the dealers report him? He said that the dealers all knew about it but did not want to get messed up in the affair, but he would get caught sooner or later. I had made a narrow escape and took my friend's advice by not returning to Romm's store.

Lest the skeptical reader believe that these forgeries are few and easy to detect, I quote from the following to show how even the British Museum was taken in:

"For the first time in its history, it is said, the British Museum has been deceived into certifying a forgery as a genuine work. Not until the book, reputed to be the rare first edition of Isaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, 1653, was sent to Sotheby's to be sold at auction was the discovery made that the volume is one of the cleverest of forgeries, printed in 1928. The book was bought under unusual circumstances by Arthur Carlton, the well known English comic conjurer. Mr. Carlton relates his experiences as follows:

"I met an acquaintance who had an old book which could be bought cheap and fixed the price at four pounds. It purported to be a first edition of Walton's *Angler* which sold some time ago for one thousand pounds. The next day at my club I showed it to an old friend who suggested that we should get the opinion of the British Museum upon it. We took the volume to the museum where an expert carefully examined it, compared it with a museum copy, pronounced it the genuine first, and offered to get it cleaned and repaired for me. After it had been there several days I received a receipt for it which was taken to Sotheby's to arrange for its sale. I was told that it might bring two thousand pounds, so I gave them a letter of authority to view the book at the book-

binder's. The fake was promptly discovered by Sotheby's expert holding the title page up to the light and revealing the erasure of a few words of modern print on the verso of the page, denoting that the book was a facsimile issued in 1928."

Again, let not the reader believe that only old books are used by the forgers for their nefarious devices. I could name scores of modern books, some of them not over ten years old. *Jurgen* by Cabell, quickly comes to mind; *Messer Marco Polo* is another; of the latter, the date at the bottom of the title-page has been faked, and the book may be detected by looking up the last word on page ten. This word is "of." In the faked copy the letter "f" is almost entirely absent. In the case of *Jurgen*, while the book was lying under arrest in Mr. Sumner's cellar, some enterprising thief brought out a pirated edition. It is a crude imitation of the McBride format, lacking the publisher's name on the title page and spine, bound in brown cloth, lettered in gilt, and poorly printed.

Another Cabell forgery is the famous *Poor Jack*, which was quietly circulated among the book trade in 1927. No author's name was given, but the preface was initialed J. B. C., and the implication was unavoidable. The pamphlet was bound in pink paper wrappers, antiqued to simulate age. As another indication to show how some rare book dealers can see no further than their noses, I recite the following little incident. A rare book shop in the middle west that deals in wholesale and job lots of limited editions sold me a copy of *Poor Jack* as an authentic Cabell item. I, in turn, sold it to a Cabell collector. When Mr. Brussell's excellent bibliography of Cabell came out I sold a copy of it to the collector who had earlier purchased a copy of *Poor Jack*. Mr. Brussell not only points out that the pamphlet is a forgery, he reproduces a letter from Cabell to Mr. Goldsmith in which Mr. Cabell asks Mr. Goldsmith to do what he can to make known the fraud. The collector, noting this, returned *Poor Jack* slightly embarrassed, and I immediately refunded his money, calling his attention to the fact that neither I nor, I believed,

the dealer from whom I had originally bought the pamphlet knew anything about the fraud. I returned the little book to the dealer with a letter explaining the facts and calling his attention to the article in Brussell's bibliography. What sort of a letter do you think I received in reply? The following: "I do not see why we, or you either, should assume responsibility for the theories of new bibliographers; and it is highly possible that a still newer one will come out some time with the statement that the item is authentic."

But to return to forgeries. *The Black Dog* by Coppard has a forged title page, and collectors of Coppard would do well to get Dr. Schwartz's bibliography of his works, or lacking that, to look into Percy Muir's *Points*, in which both title pages are reproduced in facsimile on pages 103-4. Collectors had better beware of copies of Lawrence's *Sun*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Harris' *My Life and Loves*, and Huneker's *Painted Veils*, all of which exist in forged copies.

Another forgery that has recently come to light is Robert Frost's *A Boy's Will*, London, 1913. The sheets are genuine enough, but it is obvious that the forger is using copies issued in the several later paper bindings and for some unknown reason is transferring the leaf of publisher's advertisements from the back of the book to the front. The forged copies are bound in plain brown cloth having no suggestion of the peculiar bronze finish of the genuine first edition binding; the front cover is crudely stamped in imitation of the genuine book.

« 4 »

A short time ago I referred to "points" and how the industrious thieves lent their tricks to this business. Indeed, the demand for points became a craze which knew no limits. Every obscure little dealer whose knowledge of bibliography was less than that of a blacksmith, hastened forward with a discovery. Here a letter

was dropped or a comma misplaced; in one place the ink was darker than in another, or possibly it was lighter. Hundreds of reasons were brought forward trying to prove that a certain copy was the earliest issued. Collectors fell in with this movement and began to scan their books page by page in an effort to find an elusive point, perhaps not noticed before.

Some read their books with charts wherein each trifling error was minutely recorded. In fact, collectors dreamed about points and began to haunt the bookstores, awaiting news of some new point unknown six hours before. Some wit suggested a ticker for the purpose of recording new points found by these maniacs and having them wired to anxious collectors over the world. Once again the inevitable happened.

Did some zealous ignoramus dream about a point in his copy of so-and-so, the collectors swarmed into booksellers' shops and demanded copies with the imagined point. Copies purchased the day before were hurriedly returned, and other copies bearing the supposed point were taken in their place. Dealers were first amused, but when the craze did not abate, they became alarmed. Copies of perfectly good first editions remained on the dealers' shelves, while collectors shouted for copies with the so-called points. Of course, the result was that copies with the demanded points rose sky-high, and again the collectors competed with one another in adding these rarities to their collections.

A little later some really competent bibliographer, like Percy Muir, would explode this point, and the collector, if he had been fooled into paying a fabulous price for his imagined "first issue," would utter a few curses and decide to be more cautious in the future.

At intervals some of these point manufacturers rushed to publish what they termed bibliographies. Emboldened by their former success with points, they now sought to put in print and sell their findings. The fact that bibliography is a science that re-

quires years of training, that it requires a special knowledge of printing and typesetting, that it requires a familiarity with bindings and paper, and that even more than all else it requires keen judgment and inexhaustible patience—all these things escaped them. Every jerk printed and sold what purported to be a bibliography. That these books were written in a slip-shod manner lacking all sense and reason did not faze them. They continued to pour from the presses, and many booksellers and collectors bought them without investigating the qualifications of the compiler. A few of the more industrious proceeded to issue guides for the collector in which misinformation was mingled with fictitious prices. These were issued, not at nominal sums, as one would be led to believe, considering the work, but at outrageous prices, varying from ten to fifteen or twenty dollars.

Because it might save the collector considerable money and much unhappiness, I list a few of the so-called bibliographies and guide books that should be avoided. *Bibliography of The Writings of William Somerset Maugham*, by Frederick T. Bason; if anyone is in doubt about the worthlessness of the book, I refer him to John Carter's review in the *Publishers' Weekly* for January 16, 1932. *American First Editions, Their Points and Prices*, by Leon Miller. Read David Randall's review of this "Comedy of Errors" in the P. W. for September 16, 1933. *Modern British Authors, Their First Editions*, compiled by B. D. Cutler and Villa Stiles. This is nothing but a compilation of other peoples' work, and is greatly overpriced. *Modern First Editions: Points and Values, First, Second and Third Series*. These are also a collection of other bibliographies, for which no credit was given, and which the collector would do well to ignore.

I will pass over a half a dozen other works that belong to the above category and take an example from one of America's bibliographical virtuosi. As Mr. David Randall has done an excellent job in reviewing these guides, I quote from his review.

"One is almost tempted to make the observation on first examining this book (*Modern English First Editions and Their Prices*, by William Targ) that Goldsmith's opening sentence in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, 'There are an hundred errors in this thing' is a fairly accurate resumé of its contents. Further consideration, however, leads one to reconsider—lest one be justly accused of gross understatement.

"All that the reviewer wrote in these pages concerning Mr. Targ's previous bibliographical escapade, *American First Editions and Their Prices*, is applicable to this work also and to repeat it would be a weariness. It may be stated again, however, that though a work of this type, competently done, would be of genuine service to dealer and collector, until it appears, a collection of catalogs, given for the asking, of any reputable dealer as James F. Drake of New York or Elkin Matthews of London, will serve infinitely better than this ten dollar compendium of misinformation.

"Perhaps the best method of indicating the extreme unreliability of the work will be to list a few of the more glaring inaccuracies. All bibliographies of their very nature contain errors, but a percentage as large as the present must set a record. In fact, there is so much possible illustrative material that some sort of classification is necessary, hence the following division into Errors of Commission, Errors of Omission, and Just Errors, of the common or garden variety. As it is no part of the reviewer's wish to furnish in these pages even an attempt at a Complete Errata or Guide to the Errors in English First Editions, perhaps a dozen of each category will suffice to prove his main and indeed only contention: *that anyone owning this and in need of information perhaps contained in it had better, unless wishing to emulate the ancient spectacle of the blind leading the blind, seek for it elsewhere.*"

Mr. Randall continues by exhibiting the various errors.

At the moment there is another great outcry about points.

Several enthusiastic London dealers have called attention to points in books that bibliographers of the old school have scoffed at. One camp will attempt to prove by the process of deduction that a copy with broken type is the first issue (the leaders of this camp are Merle Johnson and his disciple Whitman Bennett); and the opposing camp will attempt to prove by the same process that a copy with broken type is the second issue. Or someone will let it be known that he has inside information that so-and-so is the first issue; immediately a dozen dealers and collectors will rise up and shout for proofs. Controversies are at the present time in full swing about a score of books or more. Another controversy that has aroused a good deal of enthusiasm is the one over whether a second printing can be a first edition. The obvious absurdity of this did not prevent the contestants from engaging in the battle with spirit.

« 5 »

A racket that many dealers are working for all it is worth is the “mint condition” phase. The *Publishers’ Weekly* a while back ran the following article:

“We have had several letters recently protesting at the prices for ‘mint copies’ of first editions of American Authors compared with the prices asked for clean copies with some slight defect, like a name on a title page, a missing flyleaf, or a faded cover. These correspondents do not feel that such minor defects should cut the price in half, or make the books undesirable. ‘Mint copies’ are not now obtainable of many authors. These copies of first editions that do not quite come up to the standard today, will be the best obtainable in the near future. The time is coming, too, when perfect copies will be cleaned and bound and find a ready market. The collector that has unlimited resources will want the best copies that his money can buy; the collector who has limited resources will buy the best copy that he can afford to pay for. Some collectors will be satisfied to own *The Scarlet Letter*,

*Evangeline*, or *Emerson's Essays*, in artistic levant morocco bindings. Lenox, Hoe, Christie-Miller, and Huth did not hesitate to buy a rare book and send it to their binder to clean, repair and bind appropriately. Mr. Hoe was the Club Bindery's best customer, and his books when they came into the auction room were generally admired for their skillful restoration. Sooner or later collectors of American first editions will be doing just as he did because this will be the only way that they will be able to make collections, when the limited number of 'mint' copies have become unobtainable, and they might just as well begin buying the cheaper copies now, if they do not want to pay the bookseller's price for immaculate title pages, flyleaves and unfaded cloth or clean boards."

This is good common sense and perfectly true, but it really refers to the older American first editions; however, a similar situation has developed in modern first editions. Dealers will price a mint copy of, let us say, *The Sun Also Rises* at \$30, while a good copy will go for five dollars or ten dollars. In catalog number twelve of the Centaur Book Shop I find a copy of *Chivalry* by Cabell priced at \$50 with the dust wrapper; an immaculate copy but without the dust wrapper is priced at \$37.50, the dust wrapper in other words priced at \$12.50. Recently I had quoted to me first editions of William Faulkner where the dust wrapper on a copy of *Sanctuary* was priced at \$2.50. The dust wrapper on *Mosquitoes* was priced at five dollars, and these books are not over five years old!

I believe that here the dealer is as much to blame as is the collector. Too many dealers stress the dust wrapper, and almost all of them call attention to it in cataloging. The collector has become impressed with this, and many will refuse a fine copy if the wrapper is missing. This appears absurd, because the wrapper certainly has no bearing on the book; it neither adds nor detracts from its contents; and only too frequently the blurb printed on it is offensive to good taste, or downright stupid. Some

collectors have so far lost their heads that when a book happens to have two dust wrappers, that is, when a wrapper is changed for business purposes, they will insist on having both of them. This was the case a short time ago when the dust wrapper was changed for *Mosquitoes*, and collectors, finding out about it, frantically wrote to booksellers offering to pay several dollars for the jacket they lacked. It is really surprising that dealers have not set up a department in their catalogs for the sale of dust wrappers, describing these as carefully as the books. Perhaps this is being contemplated already by some enterprising dealers.

Another example that comes to mind is the wrapper for *A Farewell to Arms*. Somehow the name of the heroine was misspelled on the jacket, and some budding bibliographer, spying this, immediately trumpeted forth his information to the waiting collectors. At once the latter began looking for copies of the jacket with the name correctly spelled, while others demanded copies with the misspelling. Captain Cohn's recent bibliography of Hemingway explodes this point, with the information that the misspelling of the heroine's name was common to the dust wrappers of all editions and never corrected.

There is some sense in demanding a recent first edition in fine condition, and I am not disputing this. Certainly a book that is only a few years old has not had time enough to become rare in fine condition, and the collector is justified in demanding a fine copy. Should he not find one at once, he would do well to wait until a fine copy is obtainable, rather than be satisfied with a dirty or ex-library copy. But when collectors insist upon "mint condition" and cavil over a spot on the dust wrapper, it is carrying it too far.

« 6 »

A great many authors have been guilty of lending their support to the "Limited Edition Racket." Of course, the first that comes to mind is George Moore. This otherwise scrupulous writer leads

the list of those authors who printed their books in expensive limited editions for the collector. The Carra Edition was issued at a forbidding figure, and it is no wonder that it is now on the market at less than published price, though the publisher, Horace Liveright, says the edition is out of print. Limited editions of Mr. Moore seldom run under fifteen or twenty dollars and in number frequently exceed one thousand copies. Is it any wonder that his books are found unfailingly on the remainder market? Only recently his *A Story Teller's Holiday* was remaindered for five dollars the two volumes. Published in an edition limited to twelve hundred and fifty sets at twenty dollars, the book is now hawked around for ten dollars and less. It will require several years to absorb this great number at even half the published price. There probably are not more than five to six hundred Moore collectors—then why, you ask, publish twelve hundred and fifty copies? It is simple. An additional five hundred copies costs very little more to run off; that the collectors cannot possibly absorb more than, let us say seven hundred and fifty copies, does not concern him. A publisher is an optimist. He invariably overprints and consequently remainders. Does he first carefully consider his market as almost every other manufacturer does? He does not. He says five hundred copies will cost me so much; an additional five hundred copies will cost only a fraction more per copy, so I'll print one thousand copies and hope for a break. But as the break seldom comes, the book is remaindered to the detriment of five hundred valid copies and collectors.

Now what is the result of all this? First of all, the dealer is stuck with books that are offered on the market for less than he paid for them at wholesale. He either marks his copies down and takes a loss, or he buys the remainders and averages his cost and marks his entire stock of that book down. But what recourse has the collector got? Absolutely none. How does he feel when he sees a book offered by booksellers for three dollars, five dollars, or ten dollars that he paid ten, fifteen, or twenty dollars for?

I think he feels damn rotten about it. Conrad's *The Sisters* (one of Crosby Gaige's holdups) was published at twenty dollars in an edition of six hundred and fifty copies for America. It is today offered on the market for five dollars, and copies have sold at auction for as low as \$2.25. It is not difficult to imagine how the Conrad collectors who were gullible enough to buy this, feel today.

Let us take one more example. Cabell is a widely collected modern author, but it is doubtful if there are more than seven hundred and fifty collectors of his first editions, which is a liberal estimate. Yet McBride, his publishers, recently published a "limited edition" of his works called the *Storisende Edition*, in eighteen volumes, limited to eighteen hundred and fifty sets, at ten dollars a volume. What happened? Almost every dealer in the country got stuck with sets, and in an attempt to move them, they are now offering them on the market for one hundred dollars and less. I recently saw a set cataloged for fifty dollars and another for thirty-five dollars. Did McBride learn anything from Liveright and the Carra Edition? Did a publisher ever learn anything? Let the reader answer for himself. Every day sees the same thing take place, and the collector, frequently an able business man himself, is taken in. I could continue this list of authors who have deliberately taken advantage of the collector in complicity with the publisher, to the end of this book. Because Mr. P. H. Muir has summed this up well in his article "Some Book-collecting Blind Alleys" in the May issue of *The American Book Collector*, I quote a few paragraphs:

"First novels are now published with a flourish of trumpets and a chorus of praise for a genius combining the greatness of Fielding, Bronte, and Thackeray in one person. These pæans seem a little shrill and hysterical when applied to pseudo-Freudian interpretations of the rather nauseating family circle of Mr. Somebody-or-other's extreme youth. The truth, is, of course, that the publishers have decided to muscle in on the first edition racket. The time is overdue when the collector should show the

publisher clearly and unmistakably where he gets off. The first edition business is no concern whatsoever of the publisher, and his clumsy method of barging into it should be made to produce effects beyond the depletion of the collector's pocket, to which it is at present limited. Any extension of the extraordinary practice of producing first editions ready made—high prices, rarity artificially produced (some books are as rare as First Folios as soon as they are published) and everything all complete—should be sat upon, and the collector is the only person who can do it.

"I refer, of course, to the misbegotten monstrosity which calls itself the limited edition, and goes on calling itself such even when there are three thousand of it. Is not this racketeering with a vengeance? I have instanced in another place, the bludgeoning tactics which produce a limited edition before the trade edition. But authors are awkward fellows who do not always work to time. They promise to sign the sheets by a certain date and then go and find something better to do with their pens than signing their names a thousand times or more. On the other hand, the collector is a trusting and accommodating person. If a publisher tells him that the limited edition appeared before the trade edition, it will never enter his head that the publisher will deceive him. It seems incredible that publishers should sink to do such a thing, but in the last few years there are at least two cases of a reputable publisher printing a bibliographical note which states that the limited edition appeared before the ordinary, when in fact, precisely the opposite occurred . . . There is another perfectly sound reason for limited editions and it is professedly at the back of most of them that are produced. It is argued that (*a*) the first trade edition of a popular book is so large that the first edition of it tends to lose importance in the eyes of the collector and (*b*) that if the collector is prepared to pay a high price in order to have his books printed on good paper and well bound there can be no objection to catering for him.

"The first of these two arguments seems to me to be specious.

It falls before the objection of artificially manufacturing a first edition market, and it is seldom, in point of fact, that this sort of limited edition holds its own price. The salesrooms are littered with them and they can be bought for half their published price or less. The second argument would be sound if its provisions were unexceptionally observed. Mr. Moore's imitation parchment, Mr. Galsworthy's forel and limp lambskins are not noteworthy examples of fine book production or likely to last longer than the cloth covers of the trade editions. And if Mr. Orioli expects us to pay twenty-five shillings for three-and-sixpenny worth of text and sixpenny-worth of illustrations of Lawrence's early life, he should make it up to us in paper and binding. But does he? Not a bit of it. We dare not open the book for fear of breaking its back or soiling its cover. . . A limited edition of a collected author was recently published in America at about ten dollars, the contents of which consisted of twenty-four pages. Of these twenty-four, three contained text, fifteen were blank, and the rest were given to title-pages, certificates of limitation and the like."

I believe it was Mr. Gilbert Fabes who suggested that publishers would do well, when issuing limited editions, to publish only the number of copies ordered by booksellers in advance of publication. This would certainly at least do away with one vicious abuse, for here is one manner in which a bookseller was compelled to obtain his copies of a limited edition. I take this from a catalog recently issued by the Argus Book Shop, called *Along the North Wall*: "The Publishers told us that the number of copies of the limited edition (*Something About Eve* by Cabell) we would get would depend on the number of the trade edition that we bought, and the number of copies of the first trade edition would depend on the total order. I had to order about three hundred copies of the book in order to get what I thought would be an adequate supply of the first trade and the limited edition." Is this not a ridiculous policy for a pub-

lisher to pursue? And yet McBride was not alone in doing it; almost all the American publishers did the same thing.

With our English agents it was just as bad, although we have no complaint to make here, as our agents treated us fairly. When ordering a limited edition of a collected author we usually ordered only the number of copies we actually had advance orders for. But we found through sad experience that this method availed us nothing. We were told by our agents that we should place an order for at least ten copies if we wanted to get two or three. They told us that most American dealers follow this practice, and that some never place an order for less than fifty copies of a limited edition, thereby assuring themselves of getting at least five or ten copies. Is it any wonder, considering this, that the limited editions were printed in ever increasing numbers? For the publisher, usually unfamiliar with the collecting market, scanning these large orders, thought that there really existed as many collectors as there were orders placed. In some cases it is incredible that he thought so, but then, was he not in business to sell books? Why should he bother his head about it? If eight hundred and fifty copies of a limited edition were oversubscribed before publication by an author having about two hundred and fifty collectors, it was a lucky break for him. Of course, the inevitable happened, and today these books so eagerly oversubscribed before publication are on the remainder market.

« 7 »

The psychology of a dealer that has rare books for sale but is unwilling to let a fellow dealer look at them with the privilege of buying, is certainly a strange one. For several years I have been travelling around the country for the purpose of buying rare books. I also wished to make friends with dealers and spend an hour or two gossiping about books. Some dealers—almost all the important ones to whom I have introduced myself—have been

pleasant and gave me the run of the stock. But almost all the small dealers indicated an unwillingness to have me buy from them; in some cases, dealers have deliberately refused me the courtesy of looking through their books, and many did not care to sell at prices marked in the books or any other prices. I pondered over this and came to these conclusions:

Those dealers who have no objection to selling their books really know their books and are familiar with prices. But the other so-called dealers had no knowledge of rare books and even less idea of prices. Moreover, they were suspicious of a dealer who made it his business to go out and buy from those that were supposed to know what they were selling. They argued thus: If this fellow goes around the country with money in his wallet to buy rare books, he must know something about them; now, as I know very little about them, I might make a poor deal; therefore it is better to refuse to sell him any books. This is undoubtedly stupid reasoning and better than anything else betrays the paltry minds of many who deal in rare books. And this pettiness notwithstanding the fact that most of their rare books actually cost them next to nothing. There are dealers (and plenty of them, too) who take in books worth as high as one hundred dollars for ten cents a copy. They tell you when you reproach them for this that they must do so in order to survive. Moreover, they say, the seller has no knowledge of the value of his box of books; if a greater sum were offered, the seller might become suspicious and refuse to sell, or go somewhere else.

This is not only true of provincial dealers but is equally true of dealers in large cities. I have, in the last ten years, quoted first editions to some important dealers at very reasonable prices without selling more than fifty books at the very most. Yet I have sold these same books to other dealers at the first quotation. I sell at least as many books to dealers as to collectors from quotations and from catalogs, and yet these same large dealers will advertise again and again for a book expecting to pick it up for noth-

ing from some ignoramus in the backwoods. There is one large New York dealer to whom I have not sold a single book in ten years of quoting to him (I still quote and hope), and there is not a single one of these books that he has not advertised for again and again. And yet I sold copies of the same book to other dealers without difficulty.

« 8 »

Dr. Rosenbach, in his *Books and Bidders*, defends books as investments. He says that people of wealth could not do better than invest a good part of their money in books as securities. Moreover, he states that rare books are the only commodity that go untouched during a period of depression. While stocks, bonds and real estate are practically worthless, a rare book of the first water commands its pre-depression price. The advertisement of the Rosenbach Company a few days ago in the *Publishers' Weekly* entitled "To Those of Little Faith" stated that "certain booksellers, in surrendering to hard times by halving their prices, or accepting reasonable offers," confess that "they have charged too much in the past, or have no faith in the wares they offer."

Dr. Rosenbach, of course, is not the only champion of rare books as investments. "Two years ago," said A. Edward Newton as he landed last week from an extended tour of Europe, "I sold sixty thousand dollars' worth of bond investments and bought a First Folio Shakespeare. Today the bonds are worthless and the folio is worth sixty thousand dollars. From this I deduce that, while people are hesitant as to investments in the market, there is no question but idle money placed in rare books is a sound investment." We have already mentioned Mr. Barton Currie. In his book *Fishers of Books* he recommends "an organized day by day book exchange," high-power salesmanship and, chiefly, advertising. This, better than anything I might write, sums up what type of collector Mr. Barton Currie is. Is it any wonder that he is off of Cabell, the present Cabell market being in the dumps?

Let us see how sound these statements are. I believe that everyone will agree that generally, the demand for a commodity will affect its price. I indicated how true this is in a previous paragraph dealing with High-Spots, and Great Books by Johnson, Newton, Currie, et al. And again in the demand for books of Lawrence, Morley, Faulkner, Hemingway and Wilder. Why should not this also be true in the case of Dickens, Stevenson, Hardy, Kipling and Scott; or, with Shakespeare, Milton, Fielding, and Defoe? When a collector's assets have frozen up, when his stocks and bonds are worthless, when his real estate does not earn its taxes, why should his rare books go untouched? If demand for rare books controls their price, certainly the fallacy of the theory is proven. For what collector who is in the position mentioned above will go out into the market to buy rare books? What will he use to pay for them? It is common sense that he will, if anything, try to realise some capital on those books he already has. He will bring them into the market and offer them for sale. But who will buy them if every collector is in exactly the same position? As a consequence, the active demand for the books has been narrowed down to a few very wealthy collectors—to a few who have so much money that even in a period of depression they can spare large sums for rare books. This class being small (and as the depression continues, it becomes smaller), it is obvious that competitive bidding will be almost eliminated. If twenty buyers want one book, which is the case in prosperous times, the book will bring more money than if there are twenty books and one buyer.

But this is enough of theorizing. Let us look at the facts. Mr. Heartman points out that there are a great many catalogs being issued in which attention is called to drastic reductions in price. I am familiar with this type of catalog, usually issued by fly-by-night concerns, and it is not to these that I refer. I take the following from a recent article in the *Publishers' Weekly*:

"The bookshops all along the line are indulging in catalogs

making sweeping reductions on old and rare books. An inventory or clearance catalog, comprising five hundred and thirty-two lots, comes from Duttons, Inc. of this city, with discounts from twenty to fifty per cent. Many *rare* and *valuable* books are included in this catalog. Another catalog, Bargain Discounts of twenty-five to seventy-five per cent from original prices, comes from Goodspeed's Book Shop, of Boston. This special sale of eight hundred and thirty-four lots includes American history, art, bibliography, first editions, French literature, history, old literature, philology, periodicals, rare books, etc. From Walter M. Hill, we have received a catalog containing many books of interest to collectors, all priced comparatively low, apparently to interest book lovers who are not supposed to be over anxious to buy."

No one will call Duttons, Goodspeed, or Hill fly-by-night concerns, and to this list I could add twenty more without difficulty. I get catalogs from most of the important (and unimportant) dealers in the world. I have observed in the last several years a steady decline in prices, and in some cases really drastic reductions.

A careful study of the 1931 Book Prices will show what trend prices have taken. With rare exceptions, all books dropped, and this means not only the moderns but the old-timers, too. Of course, most writers about rare books are reluctant to admit this, but the facts are there. I know half a dozen collectors who want to sell all or part of their collections but can find no one to buy them. I have been offered three fine libraries in the last six months that I had to refuse, because I know it would be impossible to dispose of them. I am unable to sell the books I already have, let alone add to my stock—this, in spite of prices that are reasonable from any point of view. One collector of my acquaintance was cautioned against selling his library at auction by a director of the auction house, because the loss he would be compelled to take would be terrible. Even Mr. Heartman, who is one of those who defend books as investments, says in his editorial

of the August number of the *American Book Collector*, "For the present if one is not absolutely forced to sell it would be better to refrain from selling books and autographs at all until economic conditions have become a bit more stabilized." Another collector, who sold his books at auction, realised a little less than one-third of the sum he paid for them. In the last case the books were of such a nature that three years ago collectors would have dismembered each other in an effort to possess them.

Let us look at the Beatty collection. This sale was well advertised in all corners of the book buying world. In the preliminary notice it was predicted that "this sale should prove the greatest event of its kind to take place for some time past." In other statements it was said that the total value of the entire collection was approximately 200,000 pounds, and that it would be dispersed in four or five annual sales. Part 1 presumably was a quarter or a fifth of the collection, and the first part was not likely to include poor material. Part 1 was sold at Sotheby's on June 7, bringing 23,053 pounds, which, figured at present exchange rate, would make \$84,604.51. If there should be five parts averaging the total brought by part 1, the entire collection would bring approximately \$423,022.55, or a little more than half of the estimated value of the collection. It is stated on good authority that Mr. Beatty suffered a loss of about thirty per cent on what he paid for the items.

There has been a great hullabaloo over this sale. Some book-sellers claim that the prices were low because of lack of American competition. Others claim that Sotheby's was the only intelligent place to dispose of the manuscripts. But no one pointed out that the low prices might have been the result of lack of money; for as Mr. Winterich pointed out in his article on the Jerome Kern sale, the prices of books are as inexorably controlled by economic law as the price of linseed oil. Even the compiler of "Notes on Rare Books" for the *New York Times Book Review*, whose opinions are invariably conservative and who is one of

the supporters of books as investments, wrote in regard to the Chester Beatty sale, "Not one of the more famous manuscripts approached its estimated worth, and with the bearish trend so unanimous, one's faith in the immutability of rare book values is seriously shaken."

« 9 »

I am frequently asked by would-be collectors what to collect. No doubt this question is asked of every rare book dealer. For a long time I did not know just how to answer this question, for it seemed to me that any person who decided to collect books, knew what he wanted to collect by virtue of his very decision. Yet I eventually had to answer in some manner, so I said to my neophyte collector, collect what you please. Nobody can tell anybody honestly what to collect. It is entirely a matter of taste, training, temperament, financial position, and a hundred other things that will influence the collector. To say to such a person, why don't you collect incunabula, or why don't you collect Civil War material, is obviously absurd. So, as mentioned above, I tell them to collect what they please, if they want to collect something. Personally, I believe that the intelligent collector will collect the books that please him.

If you like Sinclair Lewis, by all means collect him; if you like William Faulkner, collect him. Do not collect an author because somebody else collects him, unless you like him yourself. To collect books that do not please you personally but that are being collected by others, is, I think, the vilest kind of toadism.

Of course most of the old collectors still go in for Dickens, Thackeray, Stevenson, Longfellow, etc. There are numerous collectors of these authors and others, such as the Kipling children books, Barrie's juveniles, and so on. And the reasons appear to me as follows: At some age between eight and twenty, let us say, children read a number of books that they like enormously; they appeal to them hugely. "My," they say to their young

friends, "have you read *Treasure Island*? No? Well, read it at once, it's swell." Or, perhaps it is *Little Men*, or *Little Women*, or *Tom Sawyer*, or *Huckleberry Finn*, or *The Last of the Mohicans*, or *The Wonder Book for Boys and Girls*, or any one of the juveniles widely collected today.

Now, out of this great number of children you will find a certain percentage of book collectors. These children, however, who later become book collectors, go through a vast experience. Their ideas are entirely changed; they have been exposed to many varying and potent stimuli; they have experienced numerous and diversified emotional responses. In brief, they have been conditioned. Now, the average book collector is not a moron—at least, I don't think so. He has been motivated by the contemporary intelligences, and if he is frequently shallow and a snob, he is also at times profound and a civilised human being.

Certainly no one will challenge the premise that the ideas and prejudices (mostly prejudices) formed in infancy and childhood are the most lasting ones through life. It is only necessary to stop for a moment and ponder our own lives, with their labyrinths of inhibitions and obsessions and neuroses, to decide the truth of this point. Something like this takes place. The lad reading *Treasure Island* at twelve becomes a book collector. He says to himself, "Gosh, that book *Treasure Island* is a grand book." When, later, he is looking around to add to his collection or is perhaps beginning it, it will most certainly contain a *Treasure Island*. If he is not able to buy a fine copy, he will be satisfied with a poor or fair or rebound copy, until he can afford a fine copy. What has been his motivation here? Merely this: as a book collector he certainly will want to collect the books that gave him the greatest thrill as a youth. *Treasure Island* gave him a wonderful thrill, therefore he wishes to own a first edition of *Treasure Island*.

We now reach a curious point. The collector who buys a first edition of *Little Men* at the age of thirty does not reread the book. It is unnecessary. He knows it is a great book. Did he not enjoy

it? Is it not eagerly sought for by other collectors, who think exactly as he does? It most emphatically is a great book, and he will defend it against a host of enemies if need be. The fact that today he could not reread the book is unimportant. The fact that today the book sounds silly and dull, as does much of Dickens, Scott, and Thackeray, is also unimportant.

Today he is living in a different world and reads Faulkner, Hemingway, Huxley, Mencken, O'Neill and Jeffers. He has become conditioned to a brutal, ruthless world. He fights and struggles for some independence, but alas, his heart, or, I forget, his consciousness, is responsive to memories of youth. He has reserved a spot in his being for the sentimental. Insult the memories of his youth and he will battle for them tooth and nail. They were the fine days; they were the good old days, *ad nauseam*. When he begins to collect books is it not natural that he collect the books that he enjoyed as a youngster? How many men have reread *Little Men* or *Little Women*, and how many collectors own first editions of them? As I have said, as children we thought they were magnificent; as men we wish to preserve them.

But for young people to collect Dickens or any other of the above group, unless they like them personally, would be stupid. Dickens is old-fashioned, dull, and sentimental; Thackeray is not only dull but pompous and besides, a lofty moralist. (It is today known that he possessed a set of *The Memoirs of Casanova*. A set with his autograph in two volumes and his crest and monogram stamped on all six has been discovered.) Stevenson wrote several good adventure yarns for children, but why an adult should collect him, save always for the above reasons, is beyond me. Longfellow's jingles are not only boring but downright offensive to any mind developed beyond a child's. And so on. One could examine the collected authors of the nineteenth century and throw out about two-thirds of them.

The exceptions are obvious. Writers like Poe, Whitman, Thoreau, Emerson, Hardy, Melville, Hawthorne, Moore, Hearn,

Flaubert, Balzac, to name a few, can be read today with pleasure. They are as fresh today as they were fifty years ago and every generation discovers them anew. They are vigorous, original, and honest writers. Each has made a great contribution to world literature. But because their first editions are expensive, few but the wealthy are able to collect them. To return, then; what is the young collector to collect? I encourage them to collect their contemporaries. This has several advantages. First of all, the layout of money is small and within the limits of almost everyone. With the exception of the first or early work of contemporary authors, their books can be obtained at published prices or slightly above. They can be read with pleasure and preserved. If the authors have been picked with care and discrimination, it is likely that their books will appreciate in value. But even if they don't appreciate in value, nothing has been lost. The pleasure of reading the books was worth the price of two or three or five dollars, about the same price as a theatre ticket. If the collector likes an author well enough and believes that the author has merit, let him buy his first and early work, provided the prices are not exorbitant.

Secondly, this permits the collector to explore the contemporary field. He may dip at will into what the modern world is reading and thinking. For the price of a single volume by Dickens, he may buy and read the best of contemporary minds. The stalwarts, of course, will reply with their old nonsense. They will tell you not to buy a book until the passing of time has guaranteed its greatness. If a book has withstood the ravages of years, then, and then only it becomes safe to collect it. A few words of Mr. Richard Aldington are so appropriate here that I cannot resist the temptation to quote. He says: "People are so strangely unwilling to admit the genius of a living artist. They feel so meanly of themselves that they cannot believe that one of the gods is moving among *them*, that genius lives in *their* time. They are insulted by superiority and try to ignore it or to crush it. They are afraid that they might have to do something about it, pay

some money or get up a vote of thanks. They are only interested in authors when there is a chance of getting some reflected glory, as when their friend Bilge issues his original imitation of an imitation of an imitation . . . ”

I do not deny that it is possible for collectors to make mistakes and buy some books that are worthless. Frequently this happens in the case of new authors that are ballyhooed with everything but Roman candles and kettledrums. And it is not always the collector’s fault, either. I have already discussed Thornton Wilder and the mad scramble made for his books. Yet, what has Wilder to offer to posterity? I believe nothing. His books are hollow and dull. True, he writes well, but so does Robert W. Chambers. His stories are lifeless and anemic. Who, then, were the people responsible for mistaking this academic Kathleen Norris for a first-rate genius? None other than our critical Moguls themselves. Dr. Henry Seidel Canby wrote that he had “ . . . read no other book this Fall that has given me more sheer pleasure in the reading. Its success among the discriminating should be great.” This was said of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. Burton Rascoe said: “Thornton Wilder will in time be accounted one of the treasures of our literature. At the age of thirty he has achieved the astonishing feat of writing a classic. There is no newcomer on the horizon whose future I would bet on with so much enthusiasm. He is almost alone in his eminence.”

I could continue this story, but to what purpose? It’s the same old thing over and over again. Genius is not nearly so important as influence in the literary field. The author with influence will nine times out of ten kick the genius off the field. The struggle is unfair. Return to Faulkner. *Soldiers’ Pay* was published one year before Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. Where were the big guns then to hail Faulkner? What happened? A magnificent story by a first rate genius was allowed to be *remaindered*, while the Grand Sachems of Literature were being beguiled with a piece of third-rate writing.

## Collecting Modern First Editions

1927-1937

IT IS AT ONCE INSTRUCTIVE AND AMUSING TO SCAN THE LAST TEN years of book collecting, namely, the period between 1927 and 1937. True, 1937 has just begun, but it should not be difficult to determine, within a certain latitude, what will happen. Most of the collected authors will stay: Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Morley, Cather, O'Neill and Dreiser, to name a very few, are in no immediate danger of losing their collected author status. All of the fad books will again return to their obscurity from whence they emerged for their brief day. Why people should want a first edition of Vash Young's *A Fortune to Share*, Pitkin's *Life Begins at Forty* and *More Power To You*, is certainly a secret to me. Of course there is always the reason that the people who read these books found that they wanted to collect them; it is difficult to believe that they are regular book collectors, however. The books contain a glib philosophy that appeals to the sixth-rate mind; to think of the books as contributing anything to literature, philosophy or even the essay is palpably absurd. Durant, the author of *The Story of Philosophy* is a case in point. There was a time when the first edition of the *Story* was catalogued at thirty dollars; his other books were also in demand by this type of collector. I remember seeing many advertisements for Durant's books in the first edition. Yet what has happened? Today, I dare say, you couldn't give them away.

Some authors who have only begun to be collected will either clinch their position or fall by the wayside. That there have been many flash-in-the-pan boys is known to everybody. Caldwell has

just started his career and will either turn out better stuff or become an author of potboilers; Vardis Fisher is another new man who has just appeared on the horizon. I predict a great collecting future for him, although the collectors will have less difficulty with him than they have had with Faulkner, let us say.

To the neophyte, let me explain that an author gives a collector difficulty in proportion to the length of time his work is ignored before he begins to be collected. Fisher has only three magazine articles that are a little elusive, but can be run down without much effort. His books have all been published in fairly large editions and will not be scarce for a long time; the only exception is the limited *In Tragic Life*, which was published in only 25 copies. This will become the rarest of all Fisher's books, and I suggest to anyone interested in this author that he get busy at once. An interesting point has just been discovered in a copy of *Passions Spin The Plot*, which will make the volume in the first issue even scarcer than the limited *In Tragic Life*. The publishers of Mr. Fisher are the Caxton Printers, Ltd. of Caldwell, Idaho. They write me that *Passions Spin the Plot* was at first planned to be published in 1933 and the title pages as originally printed have the 1933 date. Plans were changed, and the title pages were stripped out of the books and a new title page inserted with the 1934 date. Unfortunately, however, some misunderstanding in the bindery arose and approximately ten or twelve copies with the 1933 date got out.

Bates, Davies, Hanley, and Strong are all comparatively new to Americans; they are all to be watched. Bates is complaining that Americans don't like his work. It is true that Viking remaindered two of his books, *Seven Tales and Alexander* and *Day's End*. However, we have never been strong on short stories; perhaps, as both of these books were composed of short stories, that is the reason. However, Davies has fared little better. Harcourt remaindered his *Rings On Her Fingers*, a good novel, and just recently Covici remaindered his *Red Hills*.

I can't resist the temptation here to release a little steam on the remainder business. Let us take *The Red Hills* as an example, although the publishers know to their shame that there are plenty of others. Covici published *The Red Hills* in January of 1933. This is a fine novel, and Mr. Davies wrote me that he thinks it's his best. Yet what did Covici do with it? Precisely nothing. In point of fact, it was remaindered in less than six months time. I have a remainder list from this firm dated August 1933, in which they offer for thirty cents per copy 642 bound copies and 1000 sheets. As it is unlikely that they published more than 2000 copies they sold around 358 copies in all. Just imagine this! A fine novel by one of the leading young Welsh writers, and an American firm sells fewer than 400 copies! Even if they had canvassed the lending libraries with an intelligent prospectus, they would have sold out the edition, because the book did appeal to a wide audience. I know this because I happen to own a lending library myself in which the book was rented to no less than fifty people. Lest you believe that this case is an unusual one, I hasten to name several others. Recently four books of Robert Nathan were remaindered. Among these are some of the finest books written by Mr. Nathan and, moreover, books that are widely collected. Both of Mr. H. A. Manhood's books published in America, *Nightseed* and *Gay Agony*, have been remaindered. Is this any reflection on the Viking Press, the publishers of both of them, who the reader will remember also published and remaindered Bates?

Customers frequently ask me whether or not the books in my store are sent to me on consignment. When I reply that they are not, that every book was bought outright and must be paid for whether it is sold or not, they stare at me unbelievingly and shake their heads. To some who want to discuss it further, I explain what the publishers' viewpoint is. But as I do not believe in this point of view, I invariably make a weak case for the publishers. The fact is that I believe in books on consignment. The publishers, however, have only recently realised that it is a good thing

too. Several large publishing firms including Knopf and Viking are today sending books on consignment. The arguments of the publishers who oppose books on consignment follow this reasoning: Consigned books are not pushed, the bookseller lets them lie around and makes no effort to sell them. Inasmuch as he does not have to pay for them and can return them whenever his time is up, he does not bother his head about the publishers' investments.

Let us look at this argument and see how superficial it is. Some time ago Farrar & Rinehart published a book of *Memoirs* by de Tilly. I knew I could sell one or two copies, but I didn't want to buy more than I could sell, as this book was of a special nature, appealing primarily to those interested in the eighteenth century. Because of its special interest to readers of and about Casanova (de Tilly knew Casanova well) I believed I could possibly sell five or six copies if I had them available. I wrote to Farrar & Rinehart explaining my interest in the book and asked them to send me several copies and also asked for several copies additional "on sale." They sent them to me and I sold all the copies. The book sold for four dollars a copy. Had the publishers not sent the copies "on sale," it is unlikely that I would have sold more than the several copies bought outright. Now what has happened to the publishers' contention that books "on sale" are not pushed and lie around the store? Would it have been better for the book to remain in the publishers' warehouse, and eventually be remaindered?

The point I make is that a bookseller with thousands of titles to stock cannot afford to take all the risk in buying new books. The publisher should be willing to back his judgment by sending them out where they can be seen; and the obvious place for this is the bookstore. When publishers begin to realise that books cannot be sold in warehouses and ship their stock where it can be displayed, there will be fewer remainders. But have they realised this? Not at all. Publishers' warehouses are crammed

with books and more are being packed in every day; they remain there for a few years and then what happens? They are remaindered. In other words publishers are so short-sighted as to prefer to remainder a title for a few cents, rather than make an attempt to sell the book by sending it to the only place where it has a chance to be sold—the bookshops.

Here's another example. William Edwin Rudge, the printer of fine books, asked me if I would care for some books "on sale." Now the list of this house is very specialized, appealing largely to collectors. Moreover, the books are very high-priced. In an attempt to clear out some titles, they offered reductions running from forty to sixty per cent. I selected some titles and displayed them in the store, with the result that I sold more than half of what I had selected. Yet in both these cases there was a special reason why the publisher was willing to consign the books. In the case of Comte de Tilly, the publisher knew the book was good, but he also knew that the sale would be small. Consequently he was willing to dispose of stock in any way he could, even by consignment. Rudge never consigned books before; his only purpose was to get rid of dead stock and he knew that the only way he could get booksellers to take the books would be on consignment.

If "plugs" and special books can be sold merely by displaying them, what could the bookseller sell by having consigned live books? I venture to say that there is not a bookseller in the country who could not increase his yearly sales, and as a consequence those of the publishers, if books that are new and in demand were consigned. It is the most difficult thing in the world to buy books for a bookstore. The element of risk and gamble is always present. No matter how shrewd and knowing a buyer is, he will make mistakes. I know a buyer for a large bookstore and wondered that his stock was always in fine condition with very few mistakes showing. I knew he was a good buyer but also knew that he played "hunches" and gambled frequently on titles. One

day I happened to be in his basement and there I saw his mistakes—thousands of them.

To sum up: If publishers want to have their books sold, they cannot expect the bookseller to hold the bag. The bookseller did not publish the book, did not read it, does not know whether it is good or bad. He buys it because the publisher says it is good, and only too often the publisher is a fool or downright dishonest.

« 2 »

I have always pondered over the ignoring by collectors of Sinclair Lewis. It is only recently that I thought of what appears to me the correct reason. In another place I have shown that the collector is invariably a timid, gentle person; he dislikes the rough and brutal writers and for the most part lets them entirely alone. He goes in for the authors who can titillate him gently without exciting him too much; does he stumble upon a wild, howling fellow, he scurries into his hole and barricades himself with Wilder, Morley and Nathan.

Now Sinclair Lewis began with startling ferocity. His books, particularly *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925), *Elmer Gantry* (1927), were vicious onslaughts on a stupid society. He laid about him with a club and gave no quarter; his pen dipped in vitriol left scars on whatever it touched. Did you expect the collector to take up a chap like this? Hardly. He was avoided, and seldom if ever did a bookseller bother to catalog him. As a matter of record, the only signed edition he ever issued, *Arrowsmith*, was remaindered; and this notwithstanding that there were only five hundred copies of it and the book was less vigorous than any of the above named; moreover, it was really liked by some collectors, and a few, very few, actually bought copies.

You might ask what has happened, then, and why is Lewis today a collected author, with few rivals? The answer lies partly

in the Nobel Prize and partly in Lewis' reformation. That the man who wrote *Elmer Gantry* could also have written *Ann Vickers* is puzzling. That the same man is the author of *Work of Art* is incredible. Lewis has reformed and is atoning for his past sins; he is doing this in the only manner open to an author, i. e., by writing drivel—polite, innocuous drivel. And the collector, aware or not aware of all this, is giving him his reward by collecting him, and any day now I expect to see an announcement by his next publishers of a collected edition of the Works of Sinclair Lewis limited to “only Three Thousand Copies” at ten bucks the volume!

Lewis’ first novel was an adventure story for boys entitled *Hike and the Aeroplane*, although the author’s name, as printed on the title page, is Tom Graham. Mr. Lewis’ own copy of this book is inscribed: “To Sinclair Lewis from the author, Tom Graham, his alter ego.” This book was published in 1912. One thousand copies were printed, and fewer than eight hundred were sold. The author says that it will never be reprinted. Needless to say, it is the rarest of all Lewis’ books, and the collector who has a copy is extremely lucky.

« 3 »

The last few years have seen the decline and I venture to predict the eclipse of several authors once regarded highly by collectors. I refer, of course, to Donn Byrne, Carl Van Vechten, and Walter de la Mare. Byrne I believe has always been overrated; a good short story writer, he was built up to be a great novelist. He is really the author of one book, *Messer Marco Polo* (1921), and even this has tumbled in value from about sixty dollars to fifteen. Most certainly, as with other high-spots, the book was over-priced at sixty dollars. Some dealers even got more for their copies, and I have seen copies cataloged by the “elect” for as high as a hundred and fifty, but then, they were selling books

to bankers who (having appropriated the deposits of their customers) cared little what a book cost, if it was a high-spot. The book, far from being rare, is quite common and I have seen fifty copies catalogued within the past year.

Van Vechten started as an essayist and if he had quit writing about 1922 it would have been to his credit. Instead, he labored along, repeating himself, manufacturing ever feebler stories, until today even the backwoods æsthetes, who still talk of sophistication, will have nothing to do with him. His best books are his early books of essays. The rag-paper and tall-paper copy Van Vechten came later in the business, and copies can be had today at your own price.

De la Mare is another fellow who has not yet learned that collectors can sometimes get fed up. There are probably more limited signed editions of this author's going begging than of anybody else in England.

« 4 »

If any author has more signed presentation copies of his books hawked around than A. E. Coppard, I would like to know who it is..Even Coppard himself says that "I have a notion that I have signed nearly every first edition of *Adam and Eve and Pinch Me*. If there are any left with blank end-papers, they must surely be unique."

Although Mr. Coppard is being facetious, few facetious remarks have ever been more true. Whether or not he extracts a profit for himself, as he intimates in his bibliography, is beside the point. Collectors had better beware of this author's signed copies, for they are as common as leaves in the autumn. I have heard many collectors say that they are losing their interest in Coppard because of his practice of signing copies for all who will pay the price.

It is frequently asserted that an author should respect the collector and not do anything that will lessen the value of his

books. This I believe is nonsense. Why should an author respect the collector? What has the collector done to earn this respect? Did he help him when he was unknown, starving perhaps, or on the brink of suicide? Did he buy his books and talk about his work? Did he even search out his autograph? No! He ignored him, and if the poor devil died like a dog, the collector was unimpressed. But when the writer because of genius, perseverance, dauntless courage, or all these put together, crashes the gates of success, the collector suddenly takes an interest in him and demands that no profit be taken by the author for himself. Could anything be more unfair than this? The collector stands by and waits until an author has written his guts out and then steps in and takes the profits and hurls anathemas at the author if he charges for his signature. Regardless of how many hundreds of dollars an author's book may be valued at, it is quite certain that the author received little more than a few pennies for it. If the book was remaindered, as many collected authors' early books were, he got nothing.

« 5 »

At the present time Christopher Morley is greatly esteemed among the collectors; perhaps his books are even the most active among all the collected authors. How long this will continue is uncertain. I believe that it will not continue forever. It is true that there is something about Morley that attracts book collectors; he says nothing new, but he says it charmingly. He is best as an essayist I believe, and I have often wondered at the success of his novels. *The Haunted Bookshop* I have never been able to finish and I never cease to be amazed at its popularity. In my opinion, some of the short tales of Vincent Starrett dealing with bookshop mysteries and the like are infinitely superior; yet Morley goes on. That he does not embitter the collector with his astounding prolificacy is also a miracle. In his

latest collection of essays, *Internal Revenue*, no less than three of the essays were published separately in limited editions. As a consequence, the collector was compelled to buy four books instead of one, or, putting it differently, the collector of this author who wanted something like completeness was compelled to spend roughly around ten dollars to get what he should have been able to get for two and a half.

As it may appear to some that I am unfair to Morley, let us hastily examine his output since 1919 when he really got started. In 1919 he published 5 books; 1920, 5 books; 1921, 3 books; 1922, 5 books; 1923, 5 books; 1924, 5 books; 1925, 4 books; 1926, 3 books; 1927, 7 books; 1928, 9 books; 1929, 6 books; 1930, 7 books; 1931, 5 books. In about twelve years he issued no less than 70 books, a record, I believe. And I am not counting prefaces, introductions, and translations either.

« 6 »

Another author who dug his own grave is Hergesheimer. But a short time ago his books were in every bookseller's catalog; now you will find him on every drug-store remainder counter. Nevertheless, the limited editions of this author continue to come from the press and are unfailingly slaughtered in the auction rooms. *The Lay Anthony*, *Mountain Blood* and *The Three Black Pennys* are still sought for by collectors and command fair prices; the balance of his work, with one or possibly two minor exceptions, is ignored.

« 7 »

The ignoring of Huneker by collectors has always remained a mystery to me. He was properly America's first critic of the arts, a writer of vigorous and infectious prose, and on top of that a romantic and fetching personality. He was, besides, one of

our most accomplished gourmets, and his gargantuan thirst supported a score of saloons during his lifetime. His *Steeplejack* is one of the most entertaining autobiographies I have ever read, although (was it Mencken who suggested it?) it seems a little straitlaced for Huneker. I should like to know what influence the virtuous and mighty house of Scribner had over it. As Cezanne wrote Zola when the latter went to Paris: How about your mistresses? Who but Huneker could have written *Old Fogey*? Was its like ever seen before? And I venture to say it will not be seen again.

Still the fellow is neglected by almost all collectors. True, now and then some kindred soul finds out about him and buys his books; also, a few booksellers continue to catalog him, but ask how many of his books are sold.

He said more in his feuilletons than Van Vechten, Bierce and Saltus put together, and moreover, he said it infinitely better. His only novel, *Painted Veils*, is now in decline and although published as recently as 1920, it is curious how dated it seems to-day. Upon reflection it is actually less dated than it appears. For the underlying business of the novel is still solvent and flourishing. If some of the opinions appear familiar to us, it is only because we have finally caught up to Huneker.

Books from Huneker's library are probably scarcer than his own first editions because his complete library was presented by his friends to the Astor library. The only rare Huneker item is a file of the magazine *M'lle New York*.

« 8 »

Writing about Huneker inevitably conjures up the name of Mencken, his best friend and perhaps greatest admirer. Something like the Sinclair Lewis business happened to Mencken, and he is only just beginning to be collected. Of course, I know that some people bought his books, and he even had a few col-

lectors, but I am speaking now of collecting in the large sense. Mencken, I believe, will become one of America's most sought after writers. It is ironic that a writer appeals to the collector only after he is dead literally or figuratively. That Mencken is dead figuratively I don't believe anybody will dispute. The man has said all that he has to say and has exerted all the influence he is going to. That he was a powerful figure in America during the past fifteen years nobody will deny. Today his books can still be had for a song, in many cases even below their published prices, and not a few of the large-paper editions have actually been dumped on the market.

How long this will continue I don't know, but I don't think it will continue very long. Mencken has two or three books under way and although they will not increase his importance, they will increase his collecting circle. He plans to devote his time, now that he is relieved from the job of editing *The American Mercury*, which for the past several years has become moribund, to writing books exclusively.

It is perhaps not so strange as it is ironic that Mencken, the bugaboo of the bourgeois and capitalist classes, should now come to their defense in the present crisis. After years of vicious bludgeoning of these classes, he now makes peace with them and is ready to take them to his bosom. The trouble is, I believe, that Mencken confuses economics with morals; unwilling or unable, as are many other people, to recognize that economics make morals, or to put it another way, that our economic class determines our morals, he has attacked an innocent people for professing morals that they could no more help than they could help being the descendants of monkeys. This, I believe, is the reason for Mencken's decay and why he has no longer anything to say to us. In an age when the world cries aloud for progressive leadership he is found instead leading the cohorts of reaction; his name, once proudly hailed as a synonym for truth and rebellion, is now found heading articles in *Liberty* magazine. And it

would surprise no one to see his name in the Hearst press, alongside the column of that other traitor to truth, Benjamin De Casseres. The man beginning as a brilliant critic of art and life has degenerated into an antiquary, and by the process became a collected author.

« 9 »

A strange writer that as yet has acquired but a small circle of collectors is that inimitable, malevolent, vicious, flamboyant, literary caricaturist, Ben Hecht. Hecht writes as if all his words were afflicted with paranoia; that he is a maestro at this sort of thing is undisputed, and the feeble attempts made by that literary scavenger, Maxwell Bodenheim, to push him off his throne, far from accomplishing this, left him on it more secure than ever. Hecht has tried his hand at every kind of literary expression; he has written plays, novels, and short stories; and his short stories have had no mean sale. His work presents a peculiar paradox; it is as frequently wretched as it is brilliant, but it is always interesting. His themes seldom stray from his chosen field, the world of newspapermen and their haunts. They are brutal and sentimental. He has written books that drip pornographic obscenities—*Fantazius Mallare*; mystery stories that are perverse and haunting—*The Florentine Dagger*; novels that are beautiful and tragic—*Erik Dorn*; and at least one farcical comedy that has had few peers in the realm of slap-stick entertainment—*Count Brugga*. Today Hecht is trying his hand at Hollywood scenarios; perhaps this is the reason for his execrable later work, *A Jew In Love* and *The Twentieth Century*. If he is able to pull himself together after his Hollywood escapade, he may do something further. His future is very uncertain.

« 10 »

That the works of Frank Harris are little sought by collectors of first editions everybody knows. I have catalogued his books

repeatedly and sold very few copies for all my pains. Other dealers catalog him but seldom, and I surmise the reason is that he does not sell. The rapid decline of Harris is strange, and although his presentation copies still find a few buyers in the auction rooms, the man is obviously ignored. Why this should be so I don't understand. Is it because of Harris' venture into pornography with *My Life and Loves*? Then what about D. H. Lawrence with *Lady Chatterley's Lover*? True, most of the people responsible for Lawrence's popularity are of the younger generation, while the books of Harris are already antiquated. It is possible that the older collectors, who normally would support the Harris market, resent the fellow's *Life* and are wreaking their vengeance upon him in the only way open to them—by refusing to have anything to do with his works.

I believe that Harris will again be collected and to facilitate collecting him I have for the past several years been working on a bibliography of his work. I predict no easy time with him. His early work was published in small editions, seldom exceeding fifteen hundred copies. A pamphlet (*How to Beat the Boer*, 8vo., wraps., Lon. 1908) is already so rare that in five years of searching I have not succeeded in locating a single copy. An American book (*Love in Youth*, 12mo., N. Y. 1916) is extremely rare. The *Portraits* are becoming increasingly hard to find in the correct issues, while the four volumes of the *Life* will give the collector many sleepless nights.

Many collectors have written to me asking reasons for my insistent cataloging of Harris. In my few notes to my rare book catalogs, I could not take the time, of course, to explain my reasons. I give them here. Harris was a great writer and has made valuable and noteworthy contributions to English literature. He has written some of the finest short stories in the English language; his books on Shakespeare are filled with shrewd and penetrating criticism (even his most bitter enemies have had to admit this); he wrote at least one novel that will take

its place among important books of the 20th century; he wrote a biography that some critics have called the finest since Boswell's Johnson; his *Portraits*, although uneven in merit, have left a record of the adventuring of a first-rate mind among most of the first-rate minds of his period; and on top of this output, enough to immortalize half a dozen writers, he has written one of the most honest, fearless, and fascinating autobiographies in the English language. I hasten to add that much of the autobiography is filth, needless and stupid filth; nevertheless, subtracting the filth, enough remains to make the books an incredible human document. As quickly as enough time has elapsed, I expect some enterprising publisher to re-issue the books in an expurgated edition for popular consumption. It is a sad commentary on our civilization that precisely the opposite of this has been done; rats who thrive on the pornographic *libido* of the world have issued an edition confined entirely to the book's obscenity, carefully omitting everything else.

Norman Douglas has likened Harris to Aretino, seeing much in common in the two men. Although Douglas makes out a pretty fair likeness, I think that a better one exists between Harris and Casanova. Both men were of lowly origin, both were poor in health in childhood, and both achieved strong and robust figures in manhood. Both were adventurers pure and simple, and had Harris lived in the eighteenth century, it is not unlikely that he would have given Casanova plenty of competition. The fame as well as the fortune of both was abrupt and short-lived. Both men were hounded by an insatiable curiosity and both dabbled with scholarship, though it is incontestable that in scholarship Casanova surpassed Harris easily.

The personal qualities of both men were of striking similarity; resourcefulness, daring, vigor, robustness, brilliance, pride, and vanity. As conquerors of the feminine they were unsurpassed, and as sexual athletes they are both entitled to

first place. Both were possessed of great mental agility and in conversation neither could be approached. Both were possessed of a wit that could be devastating in attack. Both were eager to meet all the important personages of their time and both lived in exile. Both waited until their lives were lived until they began to write, not writing to live as most of the paltry adventurers of today. Both believed that when a man gets it into his head to do something and when he exclusively occupies himself with that design he must succeed whatever the difficulties. Both liked notoriety and both achieved it in the same manner, as also both wrote their memoirs in senility, not hesitating to include the erotic.

Douglas tells a story which explains how at least once Harris trapped his great man. It seems that he had just bought a fast new car and told Douglas it would be great fun to run down to Kent and see his friend, Joseph Conrad. Douglas thought it odd that Harris with his bad reputation knew Conrad, because Conrad was a very uprighteous man. Douglas did not know that Harris was using him to get another look at Conrad, for he later found out that Harris had seen Conrad only once before. The moment they entered the house Douglas knew that something was wrong. Conrad made an effort to say something polite and after three minutes escaped upstairs to sulk in his room until Harris had left the premises. As Douglas aided him upstairs, he said: "I should like to know why you bring this brigand into my house. Am I never to see the last of him?"

« II »

I have heard it said that George Moore's collecting public will rapidly decline until there are but a handful of collectors left who will trouble to collect him. With this opinion I do not concur. It is true that the last several years have seen a great number of Moore collections put on the block; but it is also true of

Hardy, Kipling, Barrie, Shaw, and Conrad. As a matter of fact, it is true of almost every writer of the nineteenth century. Yet this does not mean that these writers are no longer being collected; it means only that a great many collectors of these authors have died and as a consequence their collections are being dispersed, or the owners were compelled to sell because of financial difficulties. It is no secret that the ranks of collectors of the older school are thinning rapidly and their books are being sold at auction. This is inevitable, and the process has been going on for centuries. But I believe that Moore has a better chance of surviving than most of the collected authors of the same period.

That Moore frequently imposed upon the collectors of his books is too well known to need repeating. Just how this was accomplished, I have demonstrated in another place and will not go into it again. That Moore, together with Shaw, Hardy, Kipling, Barrie, Conrad, and Stevenson was inflated to stupendous heights during the boom is also well known. Let us take a rapid glance at some of Mr. Moore's books with the prices today; in almost every case they have tumbled, some to less than half of what they were bringing just a few years ago. *Flowers of Passion*, his first book, was catalogued at anywhere from \$300 to \$500; today copies can be had for \$200, and the other day I saw a fine copy in an English dealer's catalog for \$150. *Pagan Poems* is today catalogued at prices ranging from \$75 to \$100. The dramas of Moore are in ill repute, and prices are very low. Moore's dramas, as dramas, are very bad; probably it is true, as Shaw said of them, that they are really short stories written in play form. Of the novels I like *A Mummer's Wife* the best and am inclined to believe it is the best novel Moore wrote. Many people prefer *Esther Waters*, which is quite all right, too. Prices for *A Mummer's Wife* have remained firm, staying at around \$50. It is Moore's second novel and is scarce in fine condition. *The Confessions of a Young Man* will undoubtedly continue to

interest new generations; *Memoirs of My Dead Life* is a beautiful book and will, I am sure, continue to be collected.

Why is it that a great deal of the early Moore cannot be re-read today? Why do some of his stories seem unreal and dated? I think it is because Moore, the Irishman, who got his early training in France and wrote his books in England, never quite abandoned himself. His admiration for Balzac and Zola was sincere, but when he used them for his models it did not come off. Their influence on him was only skin deep. Unquestionably the greatest writer of his period in English, his books today seem stiff and his characters are lifeless. They are like the plays of Wilde today—dull and anemic. Moore will always be remembered for his courageous fight against English puritanism and censorship, but viewed from today's perspective the battle seems to have been a mild one.

« 12 »

An author who is undeservedly neglected by all but a handful of collectors is T. F. Powys. In my opinion he is the superior of all the writing Powyses. As yet he can be obtained, with the exception of three books, at published price or slightly above. The three books are *An Interpretation of Genesis*, 1908; *The Soliloquy of A Hermit*, N. Y. 1916; *The Left Leg*, 1923.

In the Powys bibliography by P. H. Muir and B. Van Thal, *An Interpretation of Genesis* was omitted. This was published in an edition of one hundred copies, of which fifty were destroyed. Needless to say, the book is of excessive rarity, and I have never seen a copy catalogued. It is said that the only known copy is in the possession of the author. This book was republished in 1929.

*The Soliloquy of A Hermit* in the New York edition is another scarce book. The American edition preceded the English by two years. The first English edition was remaindered, but the book was re-issued in 1926.

*The Left Leg* is the third of the trilogy that might give the collector a little trouble, although copies can still be run down for ten dollars and under.

« 13 »

It cannot be said of Huxley, as it is of Powys, that he has been neglected. Precisely the contrary is true; he is one of the most widely collected of modern authors. As most of his books were published in quite large editions, very few of them are scarce, and his later books are all common. The only exceptions are *The Burning Wheel*, 1916; *Jonah*, 1917, of which Huxley's recollection is that only fifty copies were issued; and *The Defeat of Youth*, 1918, of which two hundred and fifty copies were issued. At the present time Huxley prices are low; whether this means anything of importance I don't know. I do think that this is a good time to buy his books, as it is certain that as quickly as collecting is rejuvenated, his books will return to pre-depression prices. Huxley, together with Cabell, was taken in hand by Crosby Gaige, and the consequence was some fine remainders.

I said that Huxley is a widely collected modern writer, but can you imagine 842 large-paper copies of his *Brief Candles* being absorbed? I don't believe anybody but the publisher could, either. Although this was published in 1930 and less than half of the edition was apparently sold, another 842 copies of *Music at Night* were published in 1931, also on large paper. Today these books are on every bookseller's shelves in spite of the reduction in prices, and the collectors who were foolish enough to have bought copies have some nice lemons on their hands.

« 14 »

William McFee has just published a potboiler, *No Castle in Spain*. It is sad that a good writer must stoop to this form of prostitution to keep alive. On the other hand, it is the only means

of earning a living that a writer has, and whether or not he has a story to tell, he must write one in order to live. Perhaps in some other form of society a writer will write only when he has something to say; today, the poor devil must pound away on his typewriter to keep the wolf from the door. As he lives on royalties, the more books he has written, the more money he earns. Of course the books have to sell, but in the case of an established writer, he is certain of selling a good number on his reputation.

McFee is today enjoying quite a vogue. Obscure only a few years ago and ignored alike by the collector and public, his books today sell in the tens of thousands, and it is nothing unusual for a first edition of his to be printed in ten or fifteen thousand copies. McFee's early books are unquestionably the important ones, and copies of them are today priced steeply. Moreover, they are scarce, as editions seldom exceeded one thousand. How long the McFee market will stand up is doubtful; it probably depends upon whether or not McFee continues to write potboilers and alienates his present collectors while attracting no new ones.

Because I may have treated Mr. McFee rather harshly I take this opportunity to publish part of an interesting letter from him which deals with *No Castle in Spain*:

“ . . . I hadn’t intended to protest against the description of my *No Castle in Spain* as a potboiler because it is a free country and I am fortunate in having more than one kind of reader. But what is a potboiler? As I understand it, it is run-of-the-mill fiction, very much like the other work of an author, and without any special novelty of theme or treatment. But *No Castle in Spain* hardly fits that definition. The theme may not be startlingly original, but if you know any other novels with the same scenery and plot, I’d like to hear of them.

“All the same, I think I can see how it struck you as machine made, and I want to explain the reason. You see, I am from

England. I was reared there. I was over 30 before I came to visit here. I was over 40 before I settled here on shore. If you take a look at Galsworthy's failure to draw credible Americans in his *Forsyte* novels or Sinclair Lewis' failure (in *Babbitt* and *Arrowsmith*) to draw any save grotesque Britishers, you will understand my extreme cautiousness in attempting an American novel and in treating American characters. *No Castle in Spain* is my first American novel. I deliberately adopted a certain conservativeness of technic so that I could concentrate on making my Americans sound like real people rather than like Mutt & Jeff caricatures. If you think it is easy to transfer from one native element to another, try to imagine Ring Lardner going to England and treating the themes of Thomas Hardy or Aldous Huxley. . . . How long would William Faulkner have to live in England before he could write an English novel? Hemingway, in *A Farewell to Arms*, has what he calls a Scotch heroine. She is not British at all. She is entirely American. This is a subject that is left severely alone in all critical writing in America. I rush in where angels fear to tread."

« 15 »

Conrad is another author whose books at present are in decline. Just a few years ago *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Island*, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, and *Lord Jim*, to name a few only, were in steady demand. Today they are on every dealer's shelves, and the books go begging in the auction rooms. Catalog prices reached a new low this season, and many of the later items are actually selling below published price. As in the case of Moore, many collectors of Conrad are dispersing their collections, and there does not seem to be enough new blood to absorb them. In the case of the early novels, and incidentally, the best ones, it is doubtful if prices will drop any lower. I bring forth two reasons for this: first, as works of art,

they have not been surpassed by any novelist of his time, and as long as literature is collected, Conrad's early work will be collected. Secondly, his early work is actually scarce; editions rarely exceeded three thousand, as witness the following figures taken from Wise's excellent bibliography: *Almayer's Folly*, 2,000 copies; *Outcast of the Island*, 3,000 copies; *Nigger of the Narcissus*, 1,500 copies; *Tales of Unrest*, 3,000 copies; *Lord Jim*, 2,893 copies, and so on. On the other hand, Conrad's later work was not always his best, and as usual with novelists who have achieved success, the publishers, ignoring the wishes of the collector, printed heavily. *The Arrow of Gold* was printed in 25,000 copies for the first edition; *The Rescue* in 20,000 copies, and so on.

I can't finish this Conrad paragraph without calling the attention of those unaware of it to Mencken's excellent essay on Conrad in his *A Book of Prefaces*. In my opinion, this is one of the best studies written on him and deserves to be in every Conrad collection. Mencken ends by writing: ". . . if you want to get his measure, read *Youth*, or *Falk* or *Heart of Darkness*, and then try to read the best of Kipling. I think you will come to some understanding, by that simple experiment, of the difference between an adroit artisan's bag of tricks and the lofty sincerity and passion of a first-rate artist."

« 16 »

It took Shaw a little while to get started, but once the alarms were set going, it required a world economic crisis to stop him. The speculators played him for all he was worth, and as is customary with these gentlemen, they let someone else hold the bag. To give a better picture of what happened I take the following figures from *American Book Prices Current* through and inclusive of the years 1925 to 1931. In 1925, there were only three entries under Shaw; in 1926, ten entries; in 1927,

eight entries; 1928, nine entries. Then the boys got busy. In 1929, there are almost seven pages, or 97 items; in 1930, seven pages with 151 items; in 1931, over three pages with 70 items.

Just a few years ago, Shaw was spoken of in the same breath with Shakespeare; today, the manipulators having finished with him, he is dumped out on the bargain counter. That prices for his first editions will ever again reach the absurd heights of the boom period is incredible. Nevertheless, being only too familiar with human folly, I should not like to say they will not. How long is it since people were saying there could never be another war? Today every nation in the world is feverishly preparing for another war that will dwarf the last one. How long ago was it that people were saying there would never be another stock market crash? If only because the people who lost their money in the last crash, having learned their lesson that thieves are not to be trusted, would not give the thieves another chance. Yet, to date, there have been no less than three calamitous crashes, and I venture to say there will be plenty of others.

Where these people make their mistake is in believing that under the present system wars and stock market crashes, to name only two evils, can be avoided. Moreover, they believe it is the people's fault that there are both wars and depressions. In truth, the people have as much to do with world wars or world depressions as the people have to do with prices of Shaw first editions. In the case of Shaw, the market was carefully rigged by a handful of unscrupulous promoters; in the case of any good-sized war, the identical thing is true, with the exception that the stakes are much higher and it requires considerably more promotion.

To return to Shaw, it is incontestable that he has written some good plays. Those interested in the drama will always collect him. His novels, which once brought fantastic prices, will be collected as curiosities, if they are collected at all. They

are both bad and uninteresting. The prices for his books will eventually settle down to where they belong, and my guess is that few of them will ever see four figures again.

« 17 »

Fuller's death in 1929 awakened for a short time a little interest in his work. Again the collector acted true to form and waited for the death of the writer. But the interest was short-lived and today, less than ten years after his death, he is again forgotten. It would appear that the panegyrics in the newspapers following this writer's demise aroused the collector momentarily; taking a suspicious look at the fellow they apparently shook their heads and gave him up, for today Fuller is seldom listed among the desiderata by the booksellers.

Back in 1917 Mencken wrote: "Fuller's comparative obscurity is one of the strangest phenomena of American Letters. Despite his high achievement, he is seldom discussed, or even mentioned. Back in 1889 he was already so far forgotten that William Archer mistook his name, calling him Henry Y. Puller; *vide* Archer's pamphlet, *The American Language*, New York, 1899." This was written in 1917, and in 1919 Fuller wrote a mildly sensational novel, *Bertram Cope's Year*. Yet even this did not have its usual effect, and Fuller today is still obscure and unknown. Perhaps the publishers had not yet learned the tricks of advertising, or perhaps it is as Mencken says, a strange phenomenon. However it is, one thing is certain, and that is that Fuller is not being collected.

Huneker was probably the first critic to recognize the importance of Fuller. As early as 1902 he wrote Fuller as follows (the letter is in the possession of the author): "I was not in the city when your kind letter arrived. Let me hasten to thank you for your trouble. —suggested sending the little volume . . . you are to blame partially for its publication. Your letter in

1896 set me working — and it was not I assure you with the idea of a review that *Melomaniacs* was mailed. There are few people on the rind of this planet whose praise is dear to me. Hence your words are deeply appreciated. It is always the disciple addressing the master when I wrote you. I realised this but an hour ago when I read your magnificently subtle *At Saint Judas'.*"

Whether or not Fuller will again be excavated I should not like to say. That he is worth collecting is certain. I believe that *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani* is one of the finest novels of the romantic genre written in the United States. Neither Saltus nor Van Vechten have surpassed it, although Van Vechten came very close to it in *Peter Whiffle*. Fuller possessed not only wit and charm but combined these with a style as flawless as that of Remy de Gourmont. And yet in spite of this, the *Chevalier*, which is also a rare book, published under the pseudonym of Stanton Page, never brought over fifty dollars at the peak. His other books don't even approach this figure, and most of them can be had at published price or thereabout.

## « 18 »

Burton Rascoe called James Branch Cabell (now known as Branch Cabell) the Anatole France of America. Like most comparisons this does not mean much in itself; but when examined closely, the truth of the statement becomes apparent. I believe that Anatole France alone of all modern writers could have written *Jurgen*. Is it a coincidence that both France and Cabell are today in decline? At least ten books by France have been remaindered during the past year, and these were not remaindered because the books were overpriced and certainly not because Anatole France is unknown. The titles were among his best selling books of former years. Everyone knows that France did not have to wait long for success; his books sold

by the hundred thousand. He was crowned early by the Academy, and long before his death he was considered the dean of French letters.

The case of Cabell is the antithesis of this. His books, when they sold at all, sold a few hundred copies. The man was ignored save by the discriminating few, and the public at large never heard of him. Even today, very few people know that he has been writing books since 1904. In fact, Cabell was not even catalogued by the booksellers until late in the twenties, when the Society for the Suppression of Vice had already got hold of him. A checklist catalog of Walter Hill, a leading midwestern bookseller, did not list a single Cabell item in 1926, although close to six hundred modern first editions were listed in this catalog. A checklist catalog issued in 1921 by the firm of James Drake, one of the most eminent American dealers, did not list a single Cabell item.

But the Coolidge boom changed all this, and the speculators and promoters reaped a fine harvest at the expense of the collector. Cabell's books, which a few years before had been sold for five and ten dollars when they were sold at all, now reached twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five and one hundred dollars. The limited edition racketeer got busy, too, and the market was flooded with six and ten page books at \$22.50 a crack.

The depression has done its customary work, and Cabell is today in the dumps. Prices for his books are in some cases lower than they ought to be, and some of his recent novels are actually selling below cost. Many collectors have discarded him altogether, for having been caught with their pants down during the boom, they want to "get even" by ignoring his work. This is ever a foolish way and will avail the collector nothing. The intelligent collector, on the other hand, aware that Cabell had nothing to do with the debacle, is taking advantage of the slump and rounding out his collection at low prices. That Cabell will return to esteem is as certain as that books will continue to be

collected. And it is my guess that his prices in the future will more nearly reflect the Crosby Gaige epoch than the Great Engineer era.

« 19 »

It is not many years ago that Frank Norris was neglected by the collectors of American first editions. He, together with numerous other writers, was excavated only a little previous to the Coolidge prosperity. That Norris is an important American writer no one will deny. That he might have become one of America's greatest writers, had he lived longer, is also plausible, although *The Epic of the Wheat* points in the opposite direction. *The Pit* is plainly second-rate romance and *The Octopus* is even worse. In *A Man's Woman* Norris completely forgot himself and produced a potboiler of the lowest order. Of his few books *McTeague* stands out and commands the best price. *Yvernelle*, his first book and very scarce, comes next. But on the whole, with the above two exceptions, Norris can still be collected without a big layout of money. Perhaps the next boom, following a new world war, will change this.

« 20 »

O'Neill's rapid climb to first place in American drama is known to all. During the past twenty years he has produced a great deal of work, and if frequently the quality was sacrificed to the quantity, O'Neill was the first to admit it. In a letter he has written: "I'm going to do my job on my own terms and let nothing or no one hurry or any consideration influence me to seek a production until I'm damn good and ready for it. I've written 18 plays (long) in the last eleven years. Too much! The time I spent driving myself to write the ones that should not have been written should have been spent perfecting the fine ones . . . I'm not going to submit any play for production next year, and perhaps not the year after (this is con-

fidential). America has had a belly full of my stuff for a while — and from my end, I'm well fed up with the cheap fame and defame that began with 'Interlude' . . ."

This letter was written in 1929. In the same year was published *Dynamo*, perhaps the worst play that O'Neill has written. It was published in an edition of ten thousand copies, and even fervid collectors of O'Neill bought it grudgingly. The limited edition, issued two months later, could not be sold at all, and remainder scavengers who prey upon the mistakes of publishers bought up the edition. With his next play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill not only made amends, but attracted an even larger audience than he had before. With this book his publishers also returned to sanity, and realised that 775 copies of a limited edition was too unlimited even for O'Neill. As a consequence the limited edition consisted of 365 copies.

Almost three years actually passed before O'Neill published another play and then it seems that he began to regret his resolution made in 1929, for in October of 1933 he published *Ah, Wilderness* and in January of the following year came his *Days Without End*. George Jean Nathan calls *Days Without End*, along with *Welded* and *Dynamo*, among the poorest plays that O'Neill has written, and adds that it is also his dullest. He says further: "The net final impression is of a crude religious tract liberally sprinkled with a lot of dated Henry Arthur Jones sex in an effort to give it a feel of theatrical life." But this is not a critical paper on O'Neill, and I hasten to get back to my real business.

O'Neill has achieved the unique distinction of being the only American dramatist to compete vigorously with novels in the collecting arena. The typical American collector, for some strange reason, looks with suspicion upon drama and poetry and will have none of them. For every collector of drama and poetry there are hundreds of collectors of novels. O'Neill's first book, *Thirst*, is, of course, his rarest. The edition was

small, 1,000 copies, and the collector who possesses a copy is fortunate. Most of the early work of O'Neill is scarce, as editions seldom exceeded 2,000 copies, and it was not until the famous (or infamous) *Interlude* that the ten and twenty thousand first was launched. As a consequence, I do not believe the prices for O'Neill's books are even too high today, and the depression has had little effect upon his market. Comparatively little O'Neill material comes up for auction, and when it does, it is readily snapped up. As a matter of record, I have more than once been reduced to the ridiculous spectacle of having to turn moneyed customers from my store, unable to supply his books. At one time I wired for one of his rarer pamphlets immediately upon seeing it catalogued and I found out that the dealer had received no less than fifteen similar wires.

« 21 »

If anyone still has any doubts about Ambrose Bierce, all he has to do is refer to the United States Catalog. There he will quickly find that most of his books are out of print. The reason for this is so obvious that it need not be mentioned: the fellow does not sell. Recently, a publisher excavated several of his volumes and put them on the market with the result that they were remaindered. It is a well-known fact that Bierce never sold and was known only to a small group. The professors never had anything to say about him, and when he was mentioned at all, he was deprecated. Not only did the magazines refuse all his short stories, but he could not even get a regular publisher to issue his books. With the exception of *The Cynic's Word Book*, all his books were issued by friends. The preface to his *Tales* will never be forgotten: "Denied existence by the chief publishing houses of the country, this book owes itself to Mr. E. C. G. Steele, merchant, of this city. In attesting Mr. Steele's faith in his judgment and his friend, it will serve its author's main and best ambition."

Up until 1929 not a single biography appeared on the man, although in that year two made their appearance, one by C. Hartley Grattan, and another by Adolphe de Castro. I had hoped that the publication of these two biographies would increase the small group that are aware of him. It seems, however, that their influence was trivial if not altogether nil, and already both books have been remaindered. Mencken in his characteristic essay on Bierce (*Prejudices: Sixth Series*) makes of him a monster of cynicism. Once Bierce told Mencken that he kept the ashes of his son on his own writing desk. When Mencken suggested idly that the ceremonial urn must be a formidable ornament, Bierce replied, "Urn hell! I keep them in a cigar box."

Bierce without question is one of the finest short-story writers America has produced. As a wit and a satirist he easily surpasses any American writer. His preoccupation with war and horror resulted in his small following. But it is to his everlasting credit that he scorned the path followed by "Nancy" Howells and "Ham" Garland. His war stories are the first attempt to write about this barbarity with something approaching realism.

As Grattan points out: "Bierce was supremely successful in visualising the actualities of war. But he chose to cast his stories with extraordinary plots. Modern readers are struck by the realism of the trappings of his stories and annoyed by the "thrilling" plots. It is a contradiction that annoys them so much that they may fail to see how complete Bierce's realistic view of war really was." It is interesting to recall Bierce's criticism of Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. When asked about Crane's book, he replied: "This young man has the power to feel. He knows nothing of war, yet is drenched in blood. Most beginners who deal with the subject spatter themselves merely with ink."

The first three books by Bierce, *The Fiend's Delight* (Lon-

don, 1872), *Nuggets and Dust* (London, 1872), and *Cobwebs* (London, 1873), are unimportant, being compilations from his stuff in the magazine, *Fun*. Bierce was really aware of the ephemeral nature of the material, and the *Fiend's Delight* was published against his protest. His best book is unquestionably *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (San Francisco, 1891). The price for this book is ridiculously low. In fact the prices of Bierce's books are all still cheap today, but it is my opinion that they will not long remain so. As soon as the American collectors wake up and recognise his genius (it is taking a long time, but how many years is it since Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman were ignored?) his prices will double and — yes, treble. It is likely even that *The Tales* will rank with *Sister Carrie* and *McTeague* in auction records. That he is now passed up for Bret Harte, Hamlin Garland, and William Dean Howells is a disgrace for which the collector is partly responsible.

At last the work of Dreiser is being properly recognised for what it is — work of a first-rate writer — and strangely enough, he is also being widely collected. It is unusual for Americans to collect a living writer; in the case of Dreiser it becomes remarkable, for he belongs with the American giants, and we have not been eager to recognise our giants while they are still among us. We have found it much more convenient to wait until our great writers were dead and buried and our literary guardians have recited their formal eulogies and panegyrics over them.

Although Dreiser's books are in great demand among collectors there are really only two items that will give the collector any serious trouble. One of these, of course, is *Sister Carrie* (1900), the other is *Life, Art and Literature* (1917). The latter, a pamphlet, when originally published, sold for twenty-five cents. Today it sells for around twenty-five dollars. *Sister Carrie* has had a phenomenal jump in price. Less than ten years ago copies could be had for about fifty dollars; today one is lucky to find one at two hundred.

Many conjectures have been made about the scarcity of *Carrie*; some have held that not more than twenty copies are in existence, while others have placed the number at one hundred. Mr. Vrest Orton was the first bibliographer to unearth the facts and in doing so upset the whole romantic story of the suppression of *Carrie*. The book was not suppressed at all. The first edition consisted of 1,008 copies, of which 129 were sent out for review, 465 were sold, and the balance, 423 copies, were turned over to J. F. Taylor & Co., a remainder firm. Notwithstanding Orton's proof that *Carrie* was not suppressed, the history of the publication of the book is one of the most interesting in our literary archives. Those who want to know what happened should read the story told by Mencken in his *Book of Prefaces*. I am told that it is reported again by Rascoe in his book on Dreiser, but I haven't read his version of it. The story is still another record of the pusillanimity of American publishers.

The story of Dreiser's lost trunk will delight the mad bibliophile who dreams of finding a *Tamerlane* in an attic some day. In this trunk will be found not only the manuscript of his legendary book, *Studies of Contemporary Celebrities*, but also the manuscript of a book never heard of before, *Life of George Innes*, and numerous early poems and articles. Next to these the most desirable Dreiser manuscript is probably that of *Sister Carrie* on yellow copy paper, presented to Mencken and which he will not part with for love or money.

Because I have been accused of treating Milwaukee harshly as a city of non-book collectors, I jump at the chance to record that we had the premier of all Dreiser collectors in our city, namely Mr. W. W. Lange. However, Mr. Lange's interest in first editions, even in those of Dreiser's, did not last long, for in 1929 he disposed of his library.

## Collecting Proletarian Literature

ALTHOUGH PROLETARIAN LITERATURE OR NOVELS THAT DEAL REALISTICALLY with the working class have only recently begun to be collected, they are not new nor of recent origin as many critics lead one to believe. In point of fact, it may be claimed that the English novel had its origin in a proletarian background and that the first English novelist wrote the first proletarian novel.

During more recent times, however, particularly with the twentieth century, the proletarian novel has changed, if not in content, at least in purpose. It is no longer enough to portray working men and women aimlessly if somewhat desperately going about their business; this type of novel, with a dash of romance or sweetening of the bitter pill has been known as the regional novel and has passed through many mutations from Hamlin Garland to Glenway Wescott. Nor is it enough to show a group of characters living in hopeless poverty and squalor; this has been called the novel of defeat of the defeatist novel, and perhaps the finest modern example of it is Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*. The present-day proletarian novelist must and does have a purpose, and this purpose is to do something about the poverty and misery that the regional and defeatist novelist was willing to use but unconcerned about changing. And this new purpose is revolutionary.

At the present time the proletarian or revolutionary writers that are most actively collected are John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Erskine Caldwell, Vardis Fisher, and John Steinbeck. All these are American writers, and it is noteworthy that al-

though England can boast of several good writers who are revolutionary, few if any of them can touch Fisher, Caldwell, Dos Passos, Farrell, or Steinbeck.

John Steinbeck, whose early books were ignored until he wrote *Tortilla Flat*, has joined the ranks of the proletarian novelists with his latest book, *In Dubious Battle*. This book, which deals with a strike of migratory workers of California's apple country, will unquestionably be welcomed by the left-wing press, but it is doubtful whether it will increase his following among book collectors. One collector I know, who has read the book, praised the writing but deplored the subject.

I do not think it difficult to explain why the average book collector will shy away from *In Dubious Battle*. In the first place, it deals with a strike, and in the second place all the author's sympathies are with the strikers. But this is not all. Steinbeck not only knows the issues behind this strike—he knows the issues behind every strike: merciless exploitation of the workers. And this exploitation is presented in such clear and unmistakable terms that the average book collector (who is also the average capitalist) will hang his head in shame and disgust. Here is no melodramatic if fascinating defeatism; neither is there the usual sensational and brutal sexual adventures. In fact, there is neither melodrama nor sex; there is only the day by day chronicle of a handful of courageous and indomitable workers struggling to keep from starving. Every form of repression known to capitalism is inflicted on these workers: the courts, the police, violence, vigilantes. If you really want to know who vigilantes are, Steinbeck tells you: "Why, they're the dirtiest guys in town. They're the same ones that lynch Negroes. They like to be cruel. They like to hurt people, and they always give it a nice name, patriotism or protecting the constitution. But they're just the old nigger torturers working. The owners use 'em, tell 'em we have to protect the people against reds. Y'see that lets 'em burn houses and torture

and beat people with no danger. And that's all they want to do, anyway. They've got no guts; they'll only shoot from cover, or gang a man when they're ten to one. I guess they're about the worst scum in the world."

Whether the strike is won or lost we are not told, because the story ends with the protagonist being shot down from ambush by vigilantes. But though it is dubious whether the strike was won (perhaps why the book is called *In Dubious Battle*), I finished the book in such a fever of excitement that I couldn't get to sleep for several hours.

Steinbeck's early books are already difficult to find in clean condition, and his first book, *Cup of Gold*, is really becoming scarce. His second book, *Pastures of Heaven*, will eventually become a rarity and has had an interesting origin. It was announced for publication by Brewer, Warren and Putnam, but it was just at this time that Mr. Putnam abandoned the publishing business. *Pastures of Heaven* had already been printed and bound, and one of the partners of the firm, Robert Ballou, took over the book and started a publishing house under his own name. The title page was canceled and a new one tipped in bearing the imprint of Robert O. Ballou. A few copies with the Brewer, Warren and Putnam imprint had been sent out for review and these few are all that exist of the first issue.

Sherwood Anderson is another writer who has recently come over to the left-wing group. It is doubtful, however, whether his revolutionary writing will be understood by either the radicals or the reactionaries. Anderson was never any too explicit in his writing, and his present turn to the left seems to have taken what little clarity he had away from him. Possibly the influence of Gertrude Stein's unintelligible prose had something to do with his later confusion. One can write a novel, and Anderson has written several, in which most of the action and all the characters are motivated by a tortuous and vacillating mysticism. If the writer is something of a stylist to boot,

it is even unnecessary to have any action at all, and the story can still flounder along, only now and then extricating itself from a labyrinthine confusion. But a revolutionary writer cannot do this. First of all, he must know what he is writing about and have a definite objective. Secondly, his style must be clear and unequivocal. Thirdly, he must be convinced of the truth of his position and not merely be writing out of pity, bewilderment or indignation.

I don't believe, for these reasons, that Anderson can correctly be called a revolutionary writer. And perhaps it is also for these reasons that the collector is shying away from him. It is well known to the rare book trade that Anderson's first editions are dead stock. Nobody wants his books, not even the good bourgeois collector who has not yet heard of the proletarian novel. His later limited editions, when they sell at auction, barely bring the cost of cataloging and must make the wretched consignor groan if he is around when the books are knocked down. True, his early books still find an occasional buyer, and I believe they always will. *Windy McPherson's Son*, *Marching Men*, *Winesburg, Ohio*, *Poor White*, and *The Triumph of The Egg* are first-rate and deserve to be collected.

Floyd Dell tells an interesting story about *Windy McPherson's Son*. Dell had brought the manuscript to New York trying to sell it to a publisher. Looking over the last chapter of the book again he made a change in it without telling Anderson anything about it. It seems that Sam McPherson, the man who was wandering about seeking Truth, had come upon three children, whose mother didn't want them. Sam told her: "I know a woman in the East who would take them and raise them." This was Sam's wife who had no children. So the deal was made, and Sam, with the little girl in his arms and with one of the boys seated on either side of him, started back home. Dell liked this. It seemed to him that in a world in which Truth was so hard to find, children were a good substitute. But the

chapter did not end there. Sam picked up another child on the way home, and then another. Dell had forgotten whether it was five or seven orphans that Sam McPherson brought back to his wife. He thought that was overdoing it. Some people might even think it was funny. Because he did not want to argue with Anderson about it, Dell cut the page in two and the book ended with Sam taking the three children to Sue.

John Dos Passos will, I believe, become the most actively collected revolutionary writer. Unlike the other writers mentioned, his books sell in large editions, and it is nothing unusual for a novel of his to appear in a first edition of over ten thousand copies. Not only do his books sell, but he has had almost as many imitators as James Joyce. It is likely that Dos Passos himself is an imitator, and Granville Hicks claims that the real father of the Dos Passos technique is Nathan Asch. Nathan Asch, by the way, has written very few books, but in the first editions they are already becoming scarce. The intelligent collector who is assembling a library of contemporary American literature has not overlooked Asch, whose books occupy the first place on his shelves. His books are *The Office* (1925), *Love in Chartres* (1927), *Pay Day* (1930), and *The Valley* (1935). They have been translated into Polish, French, Spanish, Swedish, Finnish, Yiddish, Hebrew, Hungarian, German and Russian.

As was the case with Christopher Morley, Dos Passos' first book was published in England. The similarity, however, ends here. Morley's book, *The Eighth Sin*, is a collection of poems issued while he was at Oxford as an American Rhodes scholar. It is the usual unimportant book produced by almost every romantic writer. Had Morley not become famous later, the book would be ignored today. As it is, it is worth several hundred dollars and is the key book to a collection of Morley's first editions. Dos Passos, however, had his first book published in England for another reason. For, as he writes me in a recent

letter: "For some reason my memory is a blank about how *One Man's Initiation* got to Allen & Unwin. I don't think it got shown to an American publisher—if it did it was as part of another novel that has never come out and never will. That and the *Garbage Man* were parts of an unfulfilled childish project. I was working in Spain at the time and it seemed easier to try it in England where there was much more freedom of expression about the war, than in Mr. Wilson's America . . ." Thus it was already possible to see the quality of his first work back in 1920.

*One Man's Initiation* (London, 1920), may well become the rarest of all Dos Passos' items. It is a fragile although courageous little book, and the publishers, Allen & Unwin, Ltd., do not know how many copies were published. It could not be many, and some of these were shipped to Doran in sheets. However, scarce as the book may become, at least it presents no mystery like *Three Soldiers*, Dos Passos' second novel. *Three Soldiers* was issued in New York by Doran in 1921. It is known that this publishing firm indicated its first editions by printing a small G. H. D. on the copyright page. However, this practice was not instituted until some time in the 1920's and was not used consistently at the beginning. For a long time it was said that first editions of *Three Soldiers* must have the colophon, yet nobody I ever spoke to or wrote to saw a copy with the colophon. Even the late Merle Johnson, the eminent authority, in his *American First Editions*, says about the book: "I am told that copies exist with the G. H. D. colophon on the copyright page, but I have not had the opportunity to inspect them." As a consequence Johnson describes the first edition only as it had usually been offered by booksellers, with "signing" instead of "singing," page 213, line 7 from the bottom.

Not satisfied with this, however, I began to search for copies with the colophon, but after repeated advertisements failed to locate a single copy I wrote to Mr. Eugen F. Saxton, who

was Doran's editor when the book was published. Mr. Saxton kindly replied that he had a first edition of *Three Soldiers* but it had no colophon. He also said that he did not believe the colophon appeared on any copies of *Three Soldiers*. I was almost convinced with this letter when a Chicago bookseller upset me by reporting that he had sold several copies with the colophon.

As I correct the proofs of this chapter a belated letter reaches me from the Library of Congress which reads in part as follows: "Mr. Roberts, the Superintendent of the Reading Room, has examined one of the copyright depository copies of 'Three Soldiers' by John Dos Passos (deposited by George H. Doran Company on September 29, 1921) [one day after the book was published] and reports that no colophon appears on the copyright page beneath the copyright notice or elsewhere. He does note, however, that on page 213, line 7 from the bottom, a word is spelled signing instead of singing." This should prove to everybody's satisfaction that *Three Soldiers* should not have the G. H. D. colophon.

*Manhattan Transfer*, for a long time another puzzle to the Dos Passos collector, can be safely bought (if you can find copies) in either cloth or pictorial boards binding. There were two thousand copies of each binding issued simultaneously. *The Garbage Man*, another difficult book, exists in two issues, the first in tan boards, the second in blue cloth, a remainder binding.

James Farrell, the bad boy of revolutionary writers, is slowly but surely developing his public and gaining an ever increasing circle of collectors. I call Farrell the bad boy of revolutionary letters because he refuses to conform to revolutionary dogma, literary log-rolling, or Marxian criticism. It is for this reason that Mike Gold, in a recent article in the *New Masses*, rebuked Farrell with anything but gentleness. For Farrell in his review of Odets (the revolutionary strong man of the theatre) had not

only called his newest play, *Paradise Lost*, "consistently, ferociously bad," but had even attacked Odets' character. This is not all. Farrell had also attacked Conroy's *The Disinherited* and Clara Weatherwax's *Marching, Marching*. Then, on top of it all, he wrote a minority opinion on Briffault's *Europa*. Surely sins enough for one revolutionary critic to commit!

Farrell began with a first novel that was clinical enough for the publishers to bring it out at a psychological document of professional interest. This was done to protect it from suppression. When *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* was published in 1934, the critics, many of whom had ignored *Young Lonigan* in 1932, began acclaiming Farrell, and his book was called the most important American novel of young adolescence since *Huckleberry Finn*. *Gas House McGinty* (1933) was not thought much of, but when Farrell published *Judgment Day* (1935), the critics hailed it as a first-rate work and he found himself famous. Hollywood, with an ear alert to literary rumblings, immediately bought the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, and it is said that James Cagney is to be starred in it.

The trilogy is now obtainable in a one-volume edition of eleven hundred pages at three dollars. I advise you to buy the one-volume edition if you can't afford first editions of all three. The three volumes will some day sell for about the same price as Hardy's and Moore's three-deckers.

I have already written about Caldwell and Fisher in the first two chapters of this book. Many collectors link Caldwell's name with Faulkner's. It is true that both came from the South (so does Thomas Wolfe, who has about as much in common with either of them as Hemingway has with Mike Gold), and it is also true that both are absorbed with the bizarre and the horrible. But the great and important difference between them is that Faulkner is satisfied with a bare portrayal of his gruesome and abnormal characters which (together with his intricate plots and stylistic mannerisms) have earned him the

name of "the Sax Rohmer for the sophisticated." Caldwell, however, although his characters are as vile and vicious as Faulkner's, and his plots are just as violent and brutal, is always seeking for the meaning of the horror he portrays.

Some collectors may wonder why I link the name of Vardis Fisher with those of revolutionary writers. It is because I believe that Fisher is on the side of revolution; and in his last letter he wrote me that his new book and the concluding volume of his tetralogy, *No Villain Need Be*, is the most revolutionary novel written by an American. As I intend to publish, very shortly, a monograph on Fisher by a brilliant young Marxist, I will not go into the business of Fisher's revolution here. The monograph will really be an attack on Fisher, because the Marxist does not believe that Fisher is a revolutionist, although he believes he is one of the best writers in the country. As Fisher has promised to write a defense of himself in the nature of a preface to the book, it ought to be exciting.

There is one American proletarian writer who is almost unknown in America, yet whose books have sold over two million copies in the fourteen countries in which they have been published. Not only are his books practically unknown in his own country, but the author himself is a legendary figure and some critics even deny that he is an American. One critic claims he is a German whose books are translated into English; another believes he is an Englishman; while he has been called variously a Russian, a Slav, and a Mexican.

If he is an American, his only rival for European popularity is Jack London, while in America his publishers report that of a first edition of 2,200 copies of his best known work, few copies have been sold. You may already have guessed that this strange writer is B. Traven, the "B" for Bruno. His books are, in order of their publication: *The Death Ship* (New York, 1934); *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (London, 1934); *Carreta* (London, 1935); *Government* (London, 1935). To

further complicate matters we find that the London edition of *The Death Ship* was a translation, while Mr. Knopf printed the book in America from the manuscript. The London edition of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, which preceded the New York edition, was also a translation, while the Knopf edition was printed from the manuscript. *Government* is a translation, but *Carreta* apparently is not.

Traven's peculiarities do not end here. When he was first approached by Mr. Knopf he refused to have anything to do with America. Later, however, he relented to the extent of permitting his celebrated *The Death Ship* to appear in America. The publisher, nonetheless, was compelled to comply with the following odd conditions: there was to be no blurb of any sort on the wrapper; and the fewer copies sold to start with, the better Mr. Traven would like it. Surely, strange conditions for an author to demand!

I might add that *The Death Ship* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* are as adventurous and exciting as any two books you can mention. But they are more than mere adventure stories. They are filled with a varied and an amazing knowledge; they indicate an understanding and sympathy that few writers possess; they make use of a philosophic wisdom such as you seldom encounter in fiction; and last but not least, they are packed with social dynamite.

Since I have written the above I have received a very charming letter from Mr. Traven, who resides in Mexico. Because the letter explains many mysteries about Traven, I asked his permission to quote from it.

"May I just mention that my first name is not Bruno, of course not; neither is it Ben, nor Benno. These names like the many nationalities I have, among them the German, are inventions of critics who want to be smart and well informed. Several times I have protested in European publications that I am not even of German race or blood. The publishers of the German

editions of my books knew from the first day of our relations that I am an American born in the U. S. A. Why my books were published in Europe and not in this country first this is another story. You are right in saying that only a few copies of my books, so far, have been sold in the U.S.A. Recently a Slovakian edition of one of my books was published in Bratislava. Sorry, I can't find this town on the map, but the book sold, in this edition, twelve hundred copies inside of six weeks. We needed more than six months to sell the same amount of copies of the same book in this country, the native country of the author which you can find on any map no matter how small."

## Casanova and His Books

THE FOLLOWING LETTER WAS WRITTEN TO THE *New Republic* but not published by that magazine. Mr. Malcolm Cowley, one of the *New Republic's* editors wrote me as follows: "I am afraid that your letter about Casanova, which has been read with interest around the office, is much too long for publication in the correspondence columns of the *New Republic*." Here's the letter:

Sir: When you announced that Mr. Edmund Wilson was to write a series of articles for the *New Republic* in which he was to include one on Casanova, I thought that the literature on Casanova would be enriched. I thought this because I have come to respect the erudition of this critic. Instead, I was sadly disappointed. Mr. Wilson failed to add anything to the literature on Casanova and contented himself with repeating, the same platitudes and shibboleths we have come to expect from those who attempt to write about the adventurer.

First of all, he opens his article with a very naive question: Why has Casanova attracted so little attention in English? Certainly Mr. Wilson knows English criticism well enough to be able to answer this himself, especially as he professes an acquaintance with Havelock Ellis' essay on Casanova. Mr. Ellis writes in his opening paragraph:

"There are few more delightful books in the world than *Casanova's Memoirs*. That is a statement I have long sought to see in print. It is true, one learns casually that various eminent literary personages have cherished a high regard for this autobiography, have even considered it the ideal autobiography, that Wendell Holmes was once heard defending Casanova,

[When Dr. Tage Bull, the greatest living Casanovist, challenged this statement, Mr. Ellis acknowledged that he had it only second hand] that Thackeray found him good enough to steal from. [Thackeray, the lofty moralist, possessed a set of the *Memoirs*, his autograph in two volumes and his crest and monogram stamped on all six have been discovered. As is customary with professional puritans, their private lives are not as pure as their public utterances would lead one to believe. Thus Sir Walter Scott, whose books are laden with prudery and sentiment, told coarse stories in private.] But these eminent personages—and how many more we shall never know—locked up the secret of their admiration for this book in some remote casket of their breasts; they never confided it to the cynical world. Every properly constituted man of letters has always recognized that any public allusion to Casanova should begin and end with lofty moral reprobation of his unspeakable turpitude."

I will pass over the fact that Mr. Wilson believes that Mr. Ellis does not go far enough into the subject by saying that up to date it is the considered opinion of scholars that the essay written in 1897 has not been surpassed. For psychological analysis of the character of Casanova it would be difficult to better. Most certainly the essays that have lately been written on Casanova, excepting Mr. Wilson's for the time being, do not even approach it in importance. Mr. Bolitho's essay in his book *Twelve Against the Gods* is perhaps the worst of them all. Not only does he have nothing new to say, but what he does say is said in the most obscure and tortuous prose imaginable. In spite of my familiarity with the literature on Casanova, I find the information culled by Mr. Bolitho concealed so effectively in his labyrinthine style that I was compelled to read paragraphs several times to find a well known and obvious point. A number of people have mistaken this intricacy for profundity. It is one of the few things that I think I am not mistaken about.

The essay by Stefan Zweig in his book *Adepts in Self Por-*

*triture* is a fine and pleasant composition. Part of its charm lies in its style, which is lucid and colorful. His knowledge of the eighteenth century is vast and accurate. His research into the customs and manners of the time brings out new and fascinating foibles.

It is curious that Mr. Wilson damns with faint praise the only intelligent book recently written on Casanova. I refer, of course, to *Casanova* by Guy Endore. Mr. Wilson calls this work, "only a popular biography." Granted that the book does not possess the brilliant psychological interpretation of Ellis, Endore nevertheless accomplished for the English student of the *Memoirs* what no previous English or American scholar did; he put into his work the best that continental Europe has thought and written of the *Memoirs* and added his own interesting speculations. As a work of assimilation it is the only attempt made by an English scholar. The book has been highly praised both in Europe and America, and the only criticism it called forth was not the fault of the author, but the fault of his publishers, John Day. Mr. Endore wrote to me saying: "Most, in fact, one might say all, of the interesting work on Casanova is in German, French, and Italian. I am poor and slow at Italian, and was moreover unable to secure many Italian items. My volume was justly criticized as weak on that score by Ilges in a recent German article. But it was not really so weak as it appeared after fully a third or more of my book was cut out by the publishers."

I will skip next the long passages in which Mr. Wilson presumes that his readers are unfamiliar with the *Memoirs* and gives a brief summary of them. We arrive at the part in which Mr. Wilson explains why Casanova has attracted comparatively little serious attention. Apparently he is dissatisfied with the explanation offered by Mr. Ellis, namely, that the English and American people are the most hypocritical, sex-obsessed, filthy-minded, smut-smellers in the world. Up to a few months ago, copies of the *Memoirs* were refused entry into the United States,

for being, so the Treasury Department ruled, obscene. And even today they are imported at the owner's risk, for any port can seize them at will and subject the importer to a legal battle. As a consequence they became the property of every dirty little pirate who could find a printer who did not fear being sent to jail. They were peddled as erotica from bookseller to bookseller, and tens of thousands were sold. A readable edition could not be obtained under one hundred dollars, and the drooling mouth and smirking lips of inhibited America furtively exchanged their dollars for sets.

Is it any wonder, considering our morals, that Casanova has attracted almost no serious attention in America and very little in England? As Mr. Endore says, all the serious and interesting work on Casanova is in German, French, and Italian. Also the best editions of the *Memoirs* are available only in German and French. The Conrad edition begun in 1907 and completed in 1913 is a treasure house of erudition on Casanova and the eighteenth century; the recently begun La Sirene edition will go down in history as a monument to scholarship. Perhaps Mr. Wilson knows these editions and perhaps he does not. The implication is that he does not, for in his next sentence, he says: "Casanovists seem almost in the category of stamp and coin collectors and people who devote their lives to looking for buried Spanish treasure in the Southwest."

What Mr. Wilson means by this statement I admit escapes me. If he means that scholars who are interested in the life of Casanova are also book collectors, his point is certainly a poor one. Some of the greatest scholars in the world have been ardent book collectors. On the other hand, if he means that Casanovists, or students of the life and time of Casanova, have been indefatigable in their studies, it is an equally poor point. Scholars are at work every minute of the day and night in search of new material on almost every conceivable subject known to the world. Not a week passes but there is a new book published on

Shakespeare. Why should not scholars be at work on Casanova? The need here is even greater, for whereas Shakespeare has been annotated to shreds and most people know all about him, Casanova is still an enigma and his very existence is hotly contested. It certainly indicates little sympathy with the subject to accuse these historians of being nothing more than stamp and coin collectors, and were Mr. Wilson better acquainted with the literature, it is unlikely that he would do so.

We now reach the crux of Mr. Wilson's article. He believes that Casanova is neglected because he did not fight for the revolution; because he was content with the world as he found it; because he did not criticize church or state; because he refused to wage war on society (the very thing he did most); in short, because he was not a Rousseau. True, as Mr. Wilson points out, Casanova was not Rousseau, but I hasten to add, thank the gods for it! He was more interested in seducing women than he was in the social revolution; his interest in the church was not one of reform or criticism, but was of a frankly worldly nature; his only concern with the state was to take advantage of it and he found the world a pleasant enough place to live in. It is for these very reasons, together with others, that he has written the most fascinating autobiography in the world. Pepys, Saint-Simon, Cellini, Amiel, are only schoolboy exercises in memoir writing by comparison. As for Harris, his *Life and Loves* does not even deserve mention in the same breath.

It is amazing that Mr. Wilson should believe that the very genius which gave Casanova his unique position in literature should be attributed to reasons for his neglect. The only excuse I can find for this strange lapse is that in his present zeal for the revolution he has been carried away from clear thinking to dogmatism. Books do not live essentially because they prove something or because they promote something; they live because they give pleasure to the reader. And as such the *Memoirs* of Casanova are quite certain of immortality. I believe that even

Mr. Wilson will agree with me that in the coming society of Communism the *Memoirs* of Casanova will not be neglected for those of Rousseau.

As many collectors have written to me for information about the first editions of Casanova, I write here what little I know of them. For some of this information I am indebted to Guy Endore, while much of it has been gleaned from books, pamphlets, catalogs, and out of the way places over a period of ten years.

In 1820, Frederick Gentzel, a clerk, offered to the Brockhaus Publishing Company of Leipzig a manuscript in French bearing the title *The Story of My Life Until the Year 1797*. This manuscript, so Gentzel wrote to F. A. Brockhaus, belonged to a descendant of the "very famous" Casanova, a man named Carlo Angiolini, who had already, many years before, been offered twenty-five hundred thalers for it.

*The Story of My Life Until the Year 1797* was examined by Brockhaus and found to be written, evidently in the author's own handwriting, on six hundred folio sheets of thirty lines to a page. But the story, instead of going to the year 1797 terminated abruptly with the year 1774, at the moment when the author was awaiting permission to return from exile to his native Venice.

Brockhaus commissioned Wilhelm von Schutz to edit and translate the *Memoirs* into German. In 1822 appeared the first volume of the first edition of the *Memoirs*, which was completed in 1828 with the publication of the twelfth volume. In 1825 a French editor, Tourachon-Molin, had the Schutz edition translated into French and published in fourteen volumes between 1825 and 1829. The third edition was published in French by Brockhaus and is dated 1826, 1832, and 1838. This edition, edited by Jean Laforgue, is now available in the Garnier reprint. Another edition, the fourth, known as the Paulin-Busoni edition, was published in Paris 1833-37. This edition has

mystified all Casanovists. The first eight volumes are piracies of the Brockhaus-Laforgue edition. But the following volumes would indicate that Busoni, whom Paulin called in to finish the job, had access to some manuscript. What manuscript nobody seems to know.

The first English edition of the *Memoirs* did not appear until 1894. Arthur Machen made the translation in 1888-89. It was published in twelve volumes, privately printed, and does not have Machen's name upon the title page. There is a certificate of issue pasted between the half title and the title-page, with the following note on verso: "This edition is strictly limited to one thousand numbered copies, five hundred of which are for America. No . . ." This edition is not to be confused with the numerous reprints and piracies which have flooded the English market in recent years. This translation, which is the only complete one in the English language, was reprinted in 1922 with Arthur Machen's name on the title page (12 vols. crown 4to. edition limited to 1000 numbered copies. Privately printed for subscribers only. The Casanova Society, London). The 1922 edition includes the two additional chapters of Vol. XII, discovered by Arthur Symons at Dux in 1899, and an index.

Arthur Machen appends the following note to this item in the Danielson bibliography: "I began my version in the middle of the fourth or fifth volume, and when I had come to an end, my employer handed me three little quartos—translations of the early part of Casanova made by a German who knew English well, but not well enough. The task of correcting his queer prose was infinitely tedious."

The books written by Casanova are now extremely rare; first editions of any one of them can be counted on the fingers of both hands, while of several titles only one copy is known. Mr. Endore says that *Les plaisantes anecdotes d'un voyage à Sultzbach* is so rare that only one copy has ever been known and even that one has disappeared. It was mentioned in a bookseller's

catalog in 1912 and was priced at forty lire. Who the purchaser was and why he disappeared forever with his volume is unknown.

Casanova's most ambitious work, *Icosameron*, which was brought out "well printed, on good paper and with all the care that a book that is not to be despised demands," met with a brutal disregard. Almost the entire edition of five hundred copies was left on his hands. At that time there were no remainder scavengers to dispose of unwanted books, and what happened to them remains a mystery. In fact, the book was so completely lost that up to 1869 there is not a single mention of it. Casanova had meanwhile become famous for his *Memoirs*, but his authorship of a five-volume novel was practically unknown. In 1854 a Parisian bibliophile, Laneden Larchey, picked up a copy from a bookstall on the quay and wrote about it to his friend Caludin. Fifteen years later he wrote two articles about it in the *Bibliophile Francais*. Since then a dozen copies have been located.

*The Histoire de ma Fuite* is so rare that only eight copies are known in the first edition. Mr. Mitchell S. Buck writes me that one of these copies was owned by an American Casanovist, the late Benjamin Alexander of Philadelphia. I have not mentioned anything about the prices Casanova brings so far, but Mr. Buck reminds me that some time ago he offered me a two-page autograph letter for three or three hundred and fifty dollars. If the price asked for this two-page letter is any criterion of the prices brought by Casanova, I should say they are ample.

Another scarce item is the 140-page pamphlet called *To Leonard Snellage, Doctor of Laws of the University of Goettingen, from Jacques Casanova Doctor of Laws of the University of Padua—1787*. This exists in only two or three copies of the first edition but was reprinted in 1903. Another pamphlet, *Lana Caprina*, written in three days, of which five hundred copies were published, now exists in only four or five copies.

In conclusion to these notes I want to call attention to another

rare Casanova item that few collectors are aware of. It is called *The Medical Interest of Casanova's Memoirs*, by Dr. J. D. Rolleston, and was reprinted privately in London in 1917. The essay, which is a brilliant medical analysis of the sexology and venereal diseases in *Casanova's Memoirs*, was first published in the *Urologic and Cutaneous Review*, vol. XXI, no. 5.

Hearing of the pamphlet for the first time about ten years ago, I began an immediate search for it. I wrote to half a dozen British booksellers, but none of them had a copy. I next commissioned Foyle's to get me a copy at any price, but even that distinguished firm finally had to admit failure. Determined to locate a copy, I advertised for the pamphlet throughout England, with no success. In desperation, I finally wrote to Dr. Rolleston at the Western Hospital in London, but even he did not have a copy. It was not until several years later, after I had exhausted every hope, that I stumbled upon a copy in the possession of a provincial English bookseller. Although the price was steep I would gladly have paid twice as much for it. The essay has since been translated into French by Raoul Veza and is included in the La Sirene edition of the *Memoirs*.

## Aleister Crowley

I HAVE LONG PLANNED TO WRITE A NOTE ON ALEISTER CROWLEY BUT have delayed it so as to be able to preface with it his bibliography upon which I am working. It appears, however, that the work on the bibliography is endless, and as I have received a number of requests for information on Crowley, I print the little I know here.

Crowley is perhaps the most libelled and slandered man alive. He has been variously described as a "monster of wickedness," "a dirty degenerate," and "England's worst man." Just the other day one of our gutter tabloids smeared over its pages the latest Crowley libel. It appears in this case that an artist's model by the name of Nina Hammett wrote a stupid book called *Laughing Torso* in which she drags Crowley's name around too freely. He brought suit against her for libel. Of course the newspapers, quickly seeing an opportunity to titillate their readers with the old stories of vice, lechery, and drunkenness, spilled their filth.

And a few years ago the press carried another story equally absurd. It seems that whenever a poor hack of a journalist is reduced to his last dime, he can always earn a couple of dollars by inventing a piece about Crowley. In this article it was made to appear that Crowley was trying to commit suicide. In the space of one week he had flung himself in the paths of speeding automobiles twenty times. (Imagine Crowley, with his enormous knowledge about every drug in existence, attempting to commit suicide in the stupid manner of a shop-girl!) And why was he trying so desperately to kill himself? Because, so the hack continues, his books would then increase in value. Crowley

had confided to him, he adds, that he had a thousand copies of his books stored away. If he could kill himself his books would immediately rise in price, he would become a sensation, and men would call him great. Who would benefit from the sale of the thousand books we are not told.

A man of many talents, Crowley has chosen the field of "Magick" in which to do his serious work. As a poet he has been ranked with the greatest of his time. His poetry can be as lyrical and saccharine as Swinburne's, and it can also be as brutal and unconventional as March's, the author of the *Wild Party*. To read his poem called *Chicago May* is an unique experience. I quote the first stanza:

This is my hour of peace; the great sow snores,  
Blowing out spittle through her blubber lips,  
Champagne and lust still oozing from the pores  
Of her fat flanks: then, let my hate eclipse  
All other lamps of my pale soul, and flare—  
A curst star sparkling in the strangled air:  
Her shapeless limbs are sticky with stale sweat;  
Yet, she would wake if I withdrew, belch hard  
The ferments of the fodder, turn, and fret  
This inch that is the ruins of a yard.  
Is there no sparrow, ram, ass, bull can stay  
The "love"—dear Jesus!—of Chicago May?

Besides this, Crowley is a linguist knowing more than a dozen languages, including Hindustani, a profounl scholar of philosophy, a mystic, a big game hunter, a practiser of magical ritual, a chemist, a chess player, a painter who has painted over two hundred canvases which will cause an artistic furore if he can be persuaded to exhibit them, a mountain climber whose achievements have never been equaled (he has climbed the Alps, the Himalayas, and the Mexican volcanoes), and number-one eccentric. He has walked across the Sahara and

across Spain and China on foot. He has lived as a Yogi in an Indian village, as a laird in Scotland, and as a "Bohemian" in London, Paris, and New York. He has been expelled from Italy by the Fascisti and was asked to leave France.

Although Crowley is one of the most fascinating writers to collect, he has but few enthusiasts. His literary output is enormous and completely distinguished in manner. Practically all his publications have been issued privately with all the unction of fine amateur printing. Of his early works, two are the rarest and almost impossible to obtain. They are also his first published writing. One of these, *White Stains*, by George Archibald Bishop (Crowley), a poetic reply to Krafft-Ebing, was very privately printed (one hundred copies) and distributed. In delicately veiled obscenities he has here written an erotic poem that would gladden the heart of Baffo, whom Casanova called the most erotic of all erotic poets. The book, being also collected for erotica, is made doubly scarce. *Aceldama*, the second of his early published work, while not as scarce as *White Stains*, will nevertheless lead the collector a merry chase.

At this point I should like to mention Mr. P. R. Stephensen's book on Crowley called *The Legend of Aleister Crowley—A Study of the Facts*. The book is an excellent record of the campaign of vilification carried on against Crowley, a campaign of persecution such as the world has never seen before. Every student of Crowley will have to be thankful to Mr. Stephensen for the facts he uncovers. The book's only weak point is the bibliographical information. Here, Mr. Stephensen, who is apparently not overmuch concerned with the niceties of bibliographical detail, makes several errors. *Konx Om Pax* is not "utterly unobtainable nowadays." The book is not common, but it is not anywhere near as scarce as a dozen others and does not begin to compare with the scarcity of *White Stains* or *Aceldama*. The same is true of *Liber 777*. Stephensen is, however, correct when he says that at present there is no man living

who possesses a complete collection of the works of Aleister Crowley. Not even Crowley himself.

Crowley wrote under what seems to be hundreds of aliases and pseudonyms. Some of these have been identified as Crowley, but a good many more have as yet not been traced. I list a few of them here: A. C.; Christabel Wharton; Ethel Ramsay; Ariel; A. Quiller; the Author of 'Rosa Mundi'; N.; O. Dhammaloyu; Ananda Vigga; J. Mc. C.; Fra. O. M.; H. K. T.; Francis Bendick; A. Quiller, Junior; Doris Leslie ('Baby'); "C"; Hilda Norfolk; Elaine Carr; Martial Nay; Edward Kelley; Perdurabo; D. Carr; Caligula II; Boleskine; Jonathan Hutchinson, natu minimus; Dost Achiba Khan; Super Sinistrum; Sherlock Holmes; Professor Jacobus Imperator; Percy Flage; Leo Vieridis; Alice L. Foote; Probationer; H. G.; Tarr M. B.; Mohammed; M. W.; Georges; Cantab; O. H.; Laura Graham; L. T.; Leo; Eric Tait; M. Tupper; Nick Lamb; Abhavananda; A. L.; Felix; Barbey de Rochechouart; Mary d'Este; Marechal de Cambronne; II; Candlestick; Panurge; John Masefield, Junior; Diogenes; David Thomas; K. S. I.; St. Maurice E. Kulm; Lemuel S. Innocent; Morpheus; K. H. A. K.; St. E. A. of M. and S.; Gentleman of The University of Cambridge; Rev. C. Verey; Count von Zonaref; Alastair McGregor; Earl of Middlesex; Mark Watts; McGregor of Boleshine; The Master Therion; Count Vladimar Svareff. To make the task more difficult, Crowley refuses to offer any help to bibliographers, apparently scorning this field of research.

One of Crowley's most remarkable books is *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* written in twenty-seven days, twelve and three-quarter hours. Stephensen says this book was suppressed after the third edition. I have a letter from the publishers in which they state the book was allowed to go out of print in the ordinary way. It is also said that the American edition of this book published by E. P. Dutton in August, 1923, was suppressed. The publishers deny this, too. Mr. Macrae, the president of the firm,

wrote me that they have no record extant showing that any question was ever raised about the suppression of this book. The American edition was printed in an edition of two thousand and twenty-five copies. A part of this edition was destroyed by water, brought about by fire. A part of the edition was sold at the regular price, and a part was remaindered at a low price. Dutton still has the plates of *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*.

*The Diary of a Drug Fiend* is such a startling book that when I found it was out of print in both England and America I was surprised. When I made an offer to Dutton to buy or use their plates for a small edition of the book I received no answer. I do not recommend the book to the faint-hearted, but if you can stand strong meat and are not afraid of a few horrors, read it by all means. If you have ever thought of taking drugs yourself, this book will not only deter you, but the mere mention of drugs will send shivers up and down your spine. It is one of the most horrible books I have ever read and one of the most gruesomely fascinating.

The anecdotes about Crowley are so numerous and so diverting that it is impossible to pick from among them. But to those who are anxious to know something more about "the beast" I refer them to the *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, published by the Mandrake Press in London. Only two volumes have so far appeared, but it is said that two more volumes have been printed and are lying in sheets in some London warehouse, no publisher having the courage to issue them. I have written to several people about these sheets, but the answers have been vague and equivocal. The *Confessions* were to be completed in six volumes. Those who take the trouble to look into these two volumes will be well repaid. A more fascinating autobiography has never been written, as indeed a more grotesque man than Crowley has never lived. Besides recounting a life that was not dull for a minute, it is illuminated with flashes of intelligence and packed with curious and esoteric knowledge.

To those who like to read their biography in fiction form I recommend *The Magician*, by Somerset Maugham, which is a novel about Crowley. Don't be surprised if the book revolts you, because Maugham painted an even more scurrilous picture of Crowley than either of those two experts in invective, James Douglas and Horatio Bottomley. In this book Maugham apparently got even with Crowley for unpleasantness suffered while a member of a Bohemian circle in Paris to which Crowley belonged. The whole story is told by Crowley in volume two of his *Confessions*.

Strange as it may seem, Crowley's manuscripts are comparatively common. They appear in booksellers' catalogs all over the world and are priced very reasonably. All his former wives (four or five?) are said to be laden down with his manuscripts also.

## Norman Douglas

NORMAN DOUGLAS HAS FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS BECOME A widely collected modern author. True, as Tomlinson said of him (in a book that purported to be on Douglas but in fact says very little about Douglas although saying much about other things), Douglas spoiled his market by publishing essays. Tomlinson goes on to say:

"We hear that he was a poor man, and that he was not helped by the sales of his earlier books, *Siren Land* and *Old Calabria*. Some critics applauded them, but the approval of all the good critics cannot buy for an author one mutton chop. Then, we learn, Norman Douglas came to an unfortunate decision. He said he would give us what we wanted. He would write a novel with all the sins in it that have ever been committed, and some that never have been. He had turned novelist, and became even popular, though only for a short time. He spoiled his market by publishing essays. They were delightful essays, and sometimes even startling in both subject and comment; but they were essays. So he published another novel, and followed that with derisive political and social criticism meant to wound our pride. Conduct so unpredictable and perverse cannot be condoned, and for that reason Norman Douglas is rarely mentioned when our best contemporary writers are named, because we do not know what to say."

For this reason also, the people that collect Douglas are as diversified in their tastes as Douglas' books are in subject. For the greatest number of collectors Douglas has only written one book that they are concerned with, namely, *South Wind*. And even many of these, the collectors of so-called Great Novels,

don't know what to make of the book. But as it has been called a great book by such a staunch Tory of letters as Saintsbury, it must surely be a great book. They put it in their collection anyway and are responsible for boosting the price of it from about fifteen dollars to over one hundred.

It will do no harm to state here that the transposition of the first two lines on page 335 of *South Wind* is almost devoid of bibliographical significance. It will be recalled that McDonald, the bibliographer of Douglas, gives priority to the issue with the transposed lines. However, on the authority of the publisher and printer this has been disproved. Mr. Muir states that copies with the transposed lines are scarcer than the normal copies, but both states were issued simultaneously. It would be a relief if those booksellers who are still harping on the transposed lines issue would take note of this and stop kidding the collector.

The scarcity of *South Wind* has been guessed at frequently. Some dealers have placed the transposed lines state at about ten copies. Mr. McDonald believes there are around twenty-five copies of this state. However, the following quotation from a letter written by Mr. Secker in 1929 indicates that both of the above guesses were wide of their mark:

"However, the fortunate possessor of the first edition of this book (*South Wind*) in any form has an item of real scarcity value; only one thousand copies were printed, of which five hundred bore Dodd, Mead and Co.'s imprint and were immediately shipped to New York, the remaining five hundred for England being bound in one lot, thus constituting the first issue. Of the five hundred English copies it is reasonable to suppose that at least two hundred fifty passed into the circulating libraries and were subsequently rebound, so that allowing for a certain inevitable wastage I cannot believe that more than two hundred perfect copies exist at the present time."

*They Went*, by Norman Douglas, published in America by Dodd, Mead, 1921, and reprinted in 1926 by the same firm, has

recently been remaindered. Knowing what we do about American publishers, we do not consider this surprising; but when we find that Dodd, Mead wrote Douglas in August, 1925, that there was very little demand for the book and that its type had been distributed "some years ago," we wonder at the reasons which led to the reprinting in 1926; as the type of the 1921 edition had been distributed, the reprinting of the book in 1926 called for considerable expense. But I sometimes pause to ask myself why I continue to wonder about the reasons for publishers printing and remaindering.

*They Went* was first published in September, 1920, by Chapman & Hall. The collectors of "great novels" will pardon me for saying that I believe this to be a better novel than the famous *South Wind*. It also sells for considerably less money, proving again my theory that merit does not count in modern book collecting nearly as much as ballyhoo. It is really appalling to find this novel walking the streets and looking for a customer with ten dollars while the seductive *South Wind* can snap its sophisticated fingers at customers with less than ten times that amount in their pockets.

*They Went* exists in only one issue and not two as some booksellers insist. There are about a dozen copies in a trial binding of red cloth lettered in black, but the book was never issued in this form. If you have a lot of money it would be fine to possess this trial binding, and just the other day Foyle's catalogued one for fifty dollars.

Tomlinson says of *Old Calabria* that beside it Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia* is mainly the captiousness of an avid adolescent with a queasy mind. It is unlikely that Lawrence collectors will agree with this. Most of the collectors that I know who have heard of Douglas as the author of other books besides *South Wind*, put *Old Calabria* as his best book.

The first issue of *Old Calabria* will give the collector a good deal of vexation. Even bibliographers cannot agree upon the

first issue. McDonald says that the first issue had blank end-papers and a sixteen-page publisher's catalog at the end. Schwartz, in his *1100 Obscure Points*, states that the first issue should have a map of Calabria occupying the end-papers and the publisher's catalog at the end dated 1914. Both Schwartz and McDonald agree that the cloth should be light green.

Muir, in his *Points*, divides the book into four issues. The first of these, which he calls the trial binding, was bound in brown buckram, with plain end-papers and had no publisher's catalog at the end. The second was bound in green cloth with plain end-papers and a publisher's catalog at the end. The third was bound in green cloth with map end-papers and no catalog. The fourth was bound in green cloth with plain end-papers and no catalog. I agree with Muir that if a collector will provide himself with a copy with the catalog, he cannot be wrong. Of course, as with *They Went*, the most desirable copy is the one with the trial binding, Muir's first issue, but rare books in trial bindings can be afforded only by bankers and are not to be had by mere bibliophiles.

The publishers of Douglas' book on aphrodisiacs must have borrowed the copy writer for the Panurge Press to make up their prospectus for them. It sounds just like their stuff. A sample: ". . . the reader glimpses into the startling mysteries of Greece and Rome, the near and far East, Mexico, Africa and medieval Europe, giving full play to his irony in the matter of human weaknesses and desires." *Paneros* certainly did not increase the Douglas following. When it was sold at all it was sold to collectors of curiosa and erotica. Good old Tomlinson, who is a more strait-laced fellow than I thought him, laments Douglas' having published it. But Richard Aldington regards it as "genuine Douglas—rare out-of-the-way erudition, handled with lightness and humor, flashes of wit, wisdom and courage."

If you want to know what such things as papaverin, yohimbine, and nux vomica mean, read the book. Or, perhaps, you

would like to know why musk was greatly desired; or what can be done with spices such as cloves, nutmeg, pepper of the red and white kind, saffron and cinnamon; also green ginger, ambergris, asafoetida, castoreum, and swallows' nests from China. There are some things in *Paneros* that you will not find in Dr. Iwan Bloch's recently published book called *Odoratus Sexualis*, and moreover it is written infinitely better than Bloch's book. I looked for, without finding, the aphrodisiac so highly extolled by Casanova, namely, truffles. The readers of the famous *Memoirs* will recall the story told by the prince of adventurers—but I forget, this is neither the time nor the place for the story.

Douglas did not entirely escape the limited edition racketeers, and a few of his later books were issued for the obvious purpose of exploiting the collector. *One Day* and *Nerinda* are examples of these. But at least the editions were small in number if high in price, so we have something to be thankful for.

Before I conclude this note on Douglas I should like to mention a short story of his called *The Forge*, which will be found in his book *Experiments*. The story was first published in the *English Review*, September, 1912, as *Forge*. This, I believe, is the best story Douglas has written and is one of the best stories I have ever read.

## A. Edward Newton

IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT MR. A. EDWARD NEWTON WILL autograph only copies of the limited editions of his books and no others from now on. Although this knowledge is of some comfort to the collector who shells out ten bucks for the limited signed edition, it is still far from reassuring when he finds out that the limited edition consists of well over one thousand copies. In the case of Mr. Newton it was absolutely necessary to safeguard the collector. Mr. Newton was not only generous with his autograph but was equally accommodating with inscriptions. Why, you might ask, should one pay ten dollars for a signed edition of a book if one can have it signed for nothing? The answer is that one would be a fool to pay the ten dollars. It is no secret that all and sundry sent their copies of the trade edition to Mr. Newton, who wrote one of his characteristic epigrams on the flyleaves and returned them to the senders.

Somewhere I have read that Mr. Newton explains his refusal to sign any but the limited editions on the ground that he no longer has the facilities for wrapping and mailing such copies as might be sent to him for his autograph. This may be true, but with thirteen hundred copies sold of the limited signed edition another reason occurs to me. Is it not poor business for a publisher to sell three to five hundred copies of a limited edition when he can just as easily sell thirteen hundred? It appears to be especially bad business when this greater sale can be effected without further expense; in fact, all that was needed to achieve this sale was the warning that Mr. Newton would sign no copies other than the limited edition. Of course, the

publishers did not neglect to state that these signed copies would sell for seven-fifty.

Newton collectors may become angry with me for suggesting such mercenary motives to a writer they love and esteem. However, it is well to remember the fact that publishers are in business for profit, and their influence over authors is great. We know how helpless a large number of writers have been in the hands of these shrewd merchants of words. But rather than go on abstractly like this, let us investigate the size of some of Mr. Newton's former limited editions. *A Magnificent Farce* was issued in a limited edition of three hundred copies; *Dr. Johnson*, five hundred copies; *The Greatest Book in The World*, three hundred and fifty copies; *A Tourist In Spite of Himself*, five hundred copies; *This Book Collecting Game*, one thousand copies; *End Papers*, thirteen hundred and fifty-one copies; *Derby Day*, eleven hundred and twenty-nine copies.

Another reason that could be advanced for Mr. Newton's refusal to sign any but the limited editions of his books is that Mr. Newton's books were rapidly approaching the status of another author who could not keep from inscribing his books to all who asked the favor, namely, Mr. A. E. Coppard. It is well known that inscribed copies of Mr. Newton's books were becoming increasingly common. Some time ago, a customer of mine who wanted an inscribed copy of *Books and Business* but was too lazy to write to Mr. Newton for an inscription, commissioned me to get one for him. The first copy that came up for auction soon after that was an inscribed copy, and I notified my agents to buy it for me. When the bill came it was only five dollars for a copy with a six-line inscription. It is well to remember that regardless of how many collectors an author may have, inscriptions, when they are plentiful, are little thought of.

The rarest of all Mr. Newton's writings is the little pamphlet called *The Club*. This was published in an edition of twenty-

five copies and was "Printed and Surreptitiously Circulated Upon the Occasion of Our Twenty-first Birthday."

The key book to a collection of A. E. N. is unquestionably *The Amenities*. It seems that this delightful book was immediately collected, for as far back as 1921 it already brought a handsome premium. Today, of course, it is scarce, and fine copies bring up to one hundred dollars. It might be well to point out that forgers have not overlooked the fact that the first edition consists of two issues. In the first issue an erratum slip is usually found at page 268 and the ninth word from the left, line three, should be Piccadilly. The forgers, knowing that the presence of the errata slip is usually taken to be *prima facie* evidence of the correct issue, inserted an errata slip in copies of the second issue. Of course the fraud can be discovered if one will look at the text. The textual reading on line three of page 268 in the second issue is "of my hotel in Pall Mall."

It is generally known to most book collectors that Newton was something of an amateur publisher in his youth. And, as these early publications of his are not believed to be numerous, collectors want to include them in collections of his work. However, some of them have proved so elusive that collectors have despaired of ever acquiring a complete set of his imprints. They make the search for a few of his rare pamphlets seem easy by contrast. To add to the difficulty, no one, not even the publisher himself, knows how many of these books were issued, and just the other day two new items were discovered. One, called *Winter Roses*, by Susan Marr Spalding (12mo, decorated boards, morocco back and corners, gilt edges), was published by Mr. Newton in 1888. The other, called *Book Lovers' Portfolio*, has an engraved title page. It was published as an oblong small quarto in pictorial stiff wrappers, with gilt wire stitching. Of this book there are believed to be only two copies known.

This volume was designed by Norman W. Forgue and printed from Linotype Granjon on Oxford Antique paper by the Black Cat Press. Twenty-five copies were printed on Worthy Sterling Wove, for private distribution. Completed at Chicago, Illinois during April, 1937.

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